

EXPLORING PAST SCHOOL EXPERIENCES TO SHAPE THE PRACTICE OF
ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the use of memories of past school experiences to help identify unnamed and unchallenged incidents of oppression that occurred in elementary and high school. What are the implications for educators when past school experiences indicate that racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and other harmful practices took place, but went unexamined and unclaimed as such? Three inter-related reflective analyses are used to investigate the experiences of teacher candidates, the thesis author, and practicing teachers to fully explore this query.

The first section examines teacher candidates' reactions to anti-oppressive education. Negative reactions by students are most often defined by scholars as resistance. This section reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of this definition. The memories students shared about their past schooling suggest looking beyond the current scope of theories that define negativity as resistance.

The second section includes a retrospective analysis of the author's past school experiences where oppressive practices based on class, sex and gender, and race occurred at school but were not identified or discussed as such. In the third section, Narrative Inquiry is used to gather stories from practicing teachers whose memories of their own schooling also indicate unnamed examples of oppression. By exploring the past through a lens of anti-oppressive educational theories, participants are able to bring a new understanding of school relationships to enhance their teaching practice and

strengthen their commitment to addressing racism, classism, sexism and other issues in schools today.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is to my daughters Mandy and Kerri who encouraged me to enroll in University and then teased me for being such a keener. Thanks to Mandy, Paul, Kerri, and Martin for the warm and special visits made all too infrequently because of the distance that separates us. This work is also dedicated to my grandchildren Jenna and Levi, who enrich my life beyond description. I hope that your schooling in all its forms will be rich and full of surprise, promise, and wonderful memories.

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PART ONE

Introduction

Part One of this research examines the negative reactions teacher candidates had to a course I was teaching that encouraged them to use anti-oppressive pedagogy in their teaching practice. Kumashiro (2000) defines anti-oppressive pedagogy as “education that works *against* various forms of oppression (p. 25). Scholars suggest that negative reactions by students are actually forms of resistance because students have difficulty accepting that their membership in dominant groups in society has knowingly or unknowingly implicated them in oppressive practices (Kumashiro, 2000; Sleeter, 1993). Martin (1995) states that “students have learned to deny or ignore the historical patterns and systemic nature of oppression...” (as cited in Schick and St. Denis, 2003, p, 57). I asked my students to examine the historical patterns of their own schooling, where through memory work, they identified oppressive practices that had remained unnamed and unchallenged as such. Part One of this thesis explores the importance using memory work in identifying racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, to make connections to the theories shared through anti-oppressive pedagogy. Italics are used in Part One to indicate my thoughts and feelings.

CHAPTER ONE: A Troubled Class

An hour before the start of class, I am pacing the floor of my office. My throat is dry and I have knots in my stomach. Instead of going over the lecture notes, I head outside thinking that maybe the fresh air and a walk along the riverbank will help clear away the dread I feel about going to teach my class. Just the usual jitters that often accompany teaching? Not exactly. We are midway through the term and things are not going well

I teach a course that uses the theories of anti-oppressive pedagogy to address social issues like racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia, and other oppressive practices that are evident in the broader society and unmistakable in the school environment. Many of my students are vocal about their dislike of the articles in the reading package and the general focus of the class. Several students refuse to read the assigned articles; they disrupt the lectures and discussions by constantly chatting amongst themselves or leaving the classroom to return with chips and pop. One student sometimes does crossword puzzles in class and others catch up on their assignments from other classes. The other day, a student turned his back to the television during a video based on a true story about a youth's life and death experiences because of ignorance and homophobia. My student said that I had no right to force him to watch content about homosexuality.

I felt defeated by the toxic environment in the classroom. I sought advice from colleagues who taught anti-oppressive pedagogy and had witnessed similar reactions in their classrooms. I reread articles about why students react negatively to anti-sexism, anti-racist, anti-homophobic information. I considered canceling class (with an assignment to be handed in later) just to give us a break from each other. I quite literally did not know where to turn. Why were my students reacting negatively to anti-oppressive pedagogy?

What is Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy?

Kumashiro (2000) provides a definition of oppression and then offers educators insights into addressing oppressive practice in schools:

"Oppression" refers to a social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world--including certain ways of identifying or being identified--are normalized or privileged while other ways are disadvantaged or marginalized. Forms of oppression include racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, colonialism, and other "isms." Anti-oppressive education aims to challenge multiple forms of oppression. (<http://www.antioppressiveeducation.org/director.html>, 2000, para. 3).

Kumashiro states that there are numerous approaches involved in teaching about anti-oppressive education and cautions teacher educators that the theories all have their own strengths and weaknesses, but that anti-oppressive educational theories should draw from feminist, critical, multicultural, queer, postcolonial, and other movements toward social justice.

Adams et al., (1997) define oppression as “the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as imbedded within individual consciousness” (p. 4). They describe the pervasive nature of oppression in that it “fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudices in a complex web of relationships that saturate most aspects of life in our society” (p. 4). The authors discuss the restrictive nature of oppression which, “denotes structural and material constraints that significantly shape a person’s life chances and sense of possibility”...and “delimits what one can imagine becoming and the power to act in support of one’s rights and aspirations” (p. 4). For example, Adams et al. (1997), suggest that the economic status of parents will predict the economic status of their children. With that in mind, the authors then are able to explore the links between various forms of oppression that privilege some and limit others. They expose hierarchical social systems, “in which dominant or privileged groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups” (p. 5). In addition, they suggest though, that individuals have memberships in multiple social groupings that can include combinations of privilege and minority status. The authors argue that it is important to understand

that there are social patterns in place that connect and mutually reinforce oppressive practices.

Kumashiro (2000) suggests that, “ in an attempt to address the myriad ways in which racism, classism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression play out in schools educators have to understand the dynamics of oppression and articulate ways to work against it” (p. 25). Articulating ways to work against oppression in North American schools includes providing teacher candidates with comprehensive histories of their own countrys’ oppressive government policies and practices. The anti-oppressive education course provides students with examples of institutional and systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, and other forms of oppression within the institutions of education, political organizations, justice, medicine, the Church, and other institutions that govern and implement practices social control in society (Schick & St. Dennis, 2003; Kumashiro, 2000; Adams et al., 1997).

My experiences with the class on anti-oppressive pedagogy caused me to examine the methods I was using to help my students understand the need to work against dominance and power in society. I thought about my own schooling and recalled that I had at various times, dreaded going to school. I had a difficult time in elementary school. I was a welfare kid in a middle to upper class school. I was constantly teased, called names, and excluded in all kinds of ways. In high school, my dislike of school turned into active resistance where I skipped classes and when I did attend, I was sometimes suspended for breaking the rules. I was outspoken in class, and can recall several times when I was told to leave the classroom when I openly (and probably not very respectfully) disagreed with teachers).

I remember my teachers saying they were disappointed in me. However, I recall that neither my teachers, principal, nor my guidance counsellor ever asked me what was wrong. They assumed certain things about me, based on my behaviour in class. Looking back at my school experiences, I realized that I was now doing to my students what my teachers had done to me. I assumed I knew why my students were acting the way they were without even asking them. When my students resisted the course material, I looked to the experts to define why they resisted. I had not simply asked them what was wrong. How did I know what they felt, knew, or understood about the issues?

Knowing this made the thought of returning to the classroom easier and more difficult at the same time. The walk along the riverbank helped me collect my

thoughts and though I knew class was about to start, I wished that I could just keep walking in the opposite direction.

I told my students that I was not prepared to continue with the class the way things were and that I wanted to address the obvious level of distress in the classroom. Students were asked them all to write down their concerns about the course material, student/teacher relationships and/or anything else they were feeling about the class. They did not have to put their names on the comments unless they wanted to and as instructed, they left the classroom when they were finished. Each student participated in this exercise. Some wrote that they were learning about privilege and dominance for the first time in their formal education. They felt they were being blamed for circumstances entrenched in society long before they were born and they were angry that some of the articles identified schools as sites of oppressive practices (Banks, 1996; Norquay, 1993; Sleeter, 1993; Giroux, 1983; Freire, 1970). They were angry and uncomfortable at the possibility that schools and schooling or perhaps their schools and schooling were flawed. The majority of responses indicated that they felt they were not given enough time to understand and accept the idea that they may be participants in oppressive practices as members of dominant society. As I read their comments, I realized that they had never before considered that school relationships and environments could play a role in the production of inequality in society (Desai, 2001; Orlowski, 2001; Banks, 1996; Skrtic, 1995).

To help my students connect the theories examining the production and perpetuation of inequality in society and the institution of education, I gave them an impromptu writing assignment during our next class. I asked them to write about experiences from their own elementary and high school days where they felt excluded or felt that their teachers or peers treated them unfairly. I asked them to describe incidents where they had treated others unfairly. For those who felt that they did not experience anything negative about their school days, I asked them to describe what it was that made them feel comfortable and safe at school.

In story after story, my students shared either their own painful experiences with bullying, being left out, name calling, or other hurtful examples where peers and teachers did or said things that hurt them. My students shared stories about times when they engaged in hurtful actions towards others. They shared their memories of feeling left out, name-calling, teasing, insults, sarcasm, bullying, and

sometimes, physical violence. None of them could remember a teacher or administrator ever stepping in to address this practice. In fact, many related examples where teachers used sarcasm and embarrassing comments to show their displeasure with individuals or groups of students.

Several students commented that even though they could identify harmful incidents that occurred during school hours, they felt that it was just a 'normal' part of growing up and that these things were only random occurrences based on individual behaviour that could have been better handled through proper classroom management and discipline. At the same time, they told me that no one had ever asked them about their teachers and the way certain teachers had treated certain students. We then discussed the victims and/or perpetrators and how 'certain students' were picked on because in some way they were "different." My students began to see a larger context regarding the way they treated each other and the ways teachers and others in authority treated them. Because the majority of their stories had to do with 'fitting in' or not fitting in, I asked them to reconsider the theories of privilege, power, and hierarchies from the course material they had earlier dismissed.

We spent the next few weeks discussing how school environments reflect social positioning, the myth of meritocracy, and the sense of entitlement that those individual and groups belonging to the majority in society exhibit. These topics are central to the course material, but after my students examined the painful and difficult situations they remembered about school, it was easier to talk with them about oppressive practices like racism, sexism, and homophobia. Remembering how it felt to be excluded or hurt in some way, or thinking back to the times when they bullied or engaged in hurtful practice towards others helped them see the course material with new perspectives. They said that by seeking their input and encouraging them to share their stories and their perspectives about their past schooling, they felt included, respected, and valued as individuals and as a group.

The students recommended that all teacher candidates spend a significant portion of class time critically analyzing memories about their elementary and high school experiences. One student said that it would be useful to hear from teachers who are practicing anti-oppressive pedagogy in Saskatchewan schools. The majority of the teacher candidates supported her request. They said that while they were learning a great deal about classroom management and the theories regarding teaching, they had never discussed the day-to-day relationships played out in the classroom with practicing teachers. My students pointed out that apart from their two -week student teaching assignments and their internships, they had little contact with teachers in the school system. They wanted to know if there were currently in-service teachers who used memory work to help them incorporate anti-oppressive pedagogy into their teaching practice in Saskatchewan schools.

The research question framing this study is: How might educators use retrospective analysis of their past childhood school experiences to help identify the oppressive practices defined in current anti-oppressive education theories? Teachers participated as children, in a school system that like society itself, was fraught with racism, sexism, homophobia, class based hierarchies and /or other oppressive practices. At the time these practices were not defined or recognized as such, especially by dominant groups. There is a gap in the literature on anti-oppressive pedagogy regarding using the memories of school teachers to help them name the ways in which identification with dominant and/or minority groups influences current teaching practice. This thesis is a step towards filling this gap.

Initially I considered asking my students to participate in my research using the memory work they shared with the class, as it had resulted in very powerful and poignant stories that others would benefit from reading. This would add a new dimension to the bodies of knowledge that explore resistance and anti-oppressive pedagogy because the information would come from the perspectives of teacher candidates rather than teacher educators or other scholars. However, after reviewing the University's guidelines for ethics and research, I realized that if I was to ask my students to participate in my research, I would be placing them within a situation that may be not in their best interests.¹ Asking my students to participate could affect their comfort levels and well-being, especially since I was in a position of power. They may have felt pressured into participating or they might have been concerned about confidentiality and anonymity during the study.

I thought back to my students' suggestions about collecting the memories from local teachers who were using memory work to inform their own practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy. If I could not include my students directly in the research process, it occurred to me that I could use their suggestions about consulting with local teachers. I then decided to seek out and record the memories and present day experiences of local teachers who are self-described activists for

¹ According to University of Saskatchewan Policies and Procedures for Ethics in Human Research, "Researchers hold trust relationships with research participants... These trust relationships can be put at risk by conflicts of interest that may compromise independence, objectivity, or ethical duties" (14).

social justice in the school environment. Feminist and anti-oppressive educator Ellsworth (1997), asked teacher educators to examine how power and dominance within school relationships shaped and formed us in the process of becoming teachers. Would exploring memories of school experiences help identify the ways in which we constructed relationships with our peers and with our teachers? In turn, could these memories be used to help inform anti-oppressive teaching practice?

Memory Work and Making Connections

To shape my research I drew on narrative inquiry which helps us understand how people think and act in situated contexts in which they live. I can, as Clandinin & Huber (2002) suggest, draw on teacher knowledge of the past because their stories “are both personal, reflecting teacher’ life histories - and social - reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which teachers live. We see teacher’s social contexts as a landscape, also constructed through narrative” (p. 161). Through narrative inquiry, a researcher can examine the past to retrieve information that sheds light on how teachers both reflect and influence larger social relationships played out within the school environment.

Thinking back to my own childhood and schooling it was not hard to recall the times where I felt hurt, insulted, isolated, and judged by other students or my teachers. I did not understand at the time why these things happened to me; however, I certainly remember the pain and anguish I felt because I knew that I did not fit in. Further retrospection caused me to recall the times when I treated other students badly. Teasing, leaving someone out, being mean, and using put-downs about someone else’s misfortune were memories I recalled easily. I do not remember ever talking to a teacher or adult about these incidents. It was understood that peer harassment was simply a part of growing up – some kind of ‘rite of passage’ perhaps.

Norquay (1993) suggested that we examine our memories of incidents that took place at school because, in her experience, transformation occurs for individuals when we learn to recognize the power of social positioning based on

constructs of race, class, gender, and other constructed social hierarchies. She describes this process as “an analysis of the social and historical forces that have influenced how I have lived in the world. By interrogating how I have constructed myself, and have been constructed...I can return to the present with a new understanding of how to bring about change” (p. 249). Norquay describes this process as “re/membering,” which encourages us to better understand the ways in which, dominant practices have worked to conceal our involvement in oppressive acts (p. 241). Ellsworth (1997) suggests that remembering our own school days “gives desperately needed voice to the intricate ways that one’s experience of being taught shapes one’s life” (p. 241). She argues that it is important to analyze hurtful experiences in the school environment because we tend to view hurtful and disturbing incidents as the everyday ordinary occurrences that had no real social significance. I can now, as an educator identify oppressive practices like classism, sexism, gender imbalances, and other issues that limited and defined me and remained throughout my school years. Anti-oppressive education addresses the myriad ways in which oppression functions and operates within society and especially within the institution of education. Our peer relationships defined our collective and individual sense of where we belonged, how we fit in, and what others thought of us. Our relationships with our teachers also depended upon how they treated us as individuals and as part of a group. Looking back, I think that this was most evident in how teachers talked to us as students or how they addressed the concerns and issues they had with us.

Ellsworth (1997) uses a technique she calls the power of address to describe the ways by which educators communicate with and relate to their students. She feels that teachers must be cognizant of *how they address students*. The author explains that the concept of ‘address’ initially applied to film and media studies where students were asked to critically analyze films using the question “who does this film think you are?” (p. 1). Ellsworth says that ‘address’ is an especially useful tool in getting to know education students. She explains:

It’s a question about how the dynamics of social positioning get played out in film viewing—who does this film address you to be within networks of power relations

associated with race, sexuality, gender, class and so on? And what difference does address make to how you read and use film...Mode of address hasn't been taken up in education. I think it should be. I think it is a provocative and productive tool for those of us who are interested in pedagogy. We can use it to shake up ways of thinking about and practicing teaching. We can use it to make visible and problematic the ways that all curricula and pedagogies invite their users to take up particular positions within relations of knowledge, power and desire (pp.1-2).

Ellsworth (1997) recommends that teachers pay particular attention to how they address their students because "mode of address... is one of those intimate relations of social and cultural power that shapes and misshapes who teachers think students are, and who students come to think themselves to be" (p. 6). In other words, re/examining the "mild and ordinary," through memory work, helps teacher candidates understand that hurtful incidents go beyond individual acts of meanness. Rather, they reflect practices rooted in exclusion, marginalization, and other forms of oppression based on how difference is regarded in the school environment or as Schick and St. Denis (2003) contend "ideological assumptions that enable and support personal and systemic inequality" (p. 59). I hoped that by encouraging my students to engage in critical reflection of their school experiences, they would then better relate to the theories of anti-oppressive education that they had dismissed or had refused to accept as valid. Frankenburg (1996) suggests that:

Memory and one's sense of self are continually (re) formed. Chains of events in a life are such that each moment seems both to lead to or even make the next, and to be remade by the moments that follow it. My childhood was then if not literally relived, certainly reconceived in context of my adult life. In this way we can say my memories, myself are reformed (p. 8).

In other words it is this continuous process of (re) forming ideas about our past school and other social relationships that help us understand how systemic inequality shaped and formed how we viewed the world as children and how we can, as Frankenburg suggests above, attempt to re/form how we look at ourselves

as adults in the world today. As far as schooling and remembering goes I believe that the memory work described by Norquay (1993), Frankenburg (1996) and Ellsworth (1997) is also important because it helps us critically analyze past relationships we had with each other as children, as well as the relationships we had with our teachers and formal education.

For instance, Ellsworth (1997) says that each new school year started out as “Exciting, promising invitations to learn - new school supplies in September; eager anticipation of discoveries, adventures, challenges, - and then disappointment, boredom, patronizing lessons, interruption, rote memorization, no context, no passion....” (p. 5). As I read Ellsworth’s portrayal of her school days, I felt as if she was describing my own. She also describes how educator Jane Tompkin’s troubling school experiences affected her. Ellsworth describes Tompkin’s “efforts to uncover what was systemic, institutional, and socially sanctioned about the stomach-clenching fear and mind- numbing boredom that she experienced in school” (p. 5). Her choice of words describing schooling as “stomach-clenching fear and mind-numbing boredom,” once again captured my own feelings so well. In sharing their memory work, I realized that my students also had similar feelings and experiences. We needed to take a hard look at areas of teaching and education many of us *experienced* but perhaps had never really discussed. My students (as we all did) grew up in a school system fraught with hurtful and exclusionary practices; a system that rewarded and punished, nourished and depleted, predicated success and denied opportunity, defined what was important to know and determined what to leave out, and gave voice to some and silenced others.

I began to see that critical examination of the past was a meaningful way for my students to personalize the anti-oppressive theories that identify ways in which teachers could either knowingly or unknowingly perpetuate oppressive practices. By listening to the stories my students shared about their past and bringing to the forefront their personal experiences, I learned what they knew and understood about their own positioning within socially constructed hierarchies. I was, in effect, getting to know them better. By adding the stories gleaned through

the memory work of practicing teachers I felt that teachers' memories and experiences with oppression in schools would help provide my students with the practical application of anti-oppressive pedagogy to teaching practice.

The exercise in memory work my students did had very interesting and rewarding results. In dismantling and analyzing memories, my students benefited because they were able to relate to and better understand how deeply embedded our socially constructed concepts of difference as a negative are. While the course material focused on racism, class issues, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression in society, we had not discussed these issues in terms of how they were played out in our own school experiences. Once we engaged in this process, some of my students wanted to know why, at least in retrospect, it seemed as if teachers or other adults did not often step in when students were being cruel to each other, or if they did, it was usually only in the form of a disciplinary measure. There was never any discussion about 'why' teasing; ostracism, bullying or other things were taking place, nor was there any discussion about respect for difference.

At the same time, several students talked about instances where their teachers had been sarcastic and/or used insults towards certain students. This information led to a debate in the class about whether or not these incidents had any deep social meaning or they were just acts of meanness that surface from time to time in most social environments. My students expressed a strong interest in re/visiting the past to see if they could identify social issues like racism, sexism, class hierarchies, homophobia as being at the root of how they treated one another. My students began to question how they, their teachers, and other adults in the school environment could have sanctioned, participated in, or at the very least accepted the mistreatment of those who did not fit in to the social norms. They felt that they had never been called upon to see this acceptance as strange or worth examining from critical perspectives.

Rottmann (2001) explains, "While all teacher education students have a minimum of three-year temporal distance from their own secondary schooling, they may not have had the opportunity to make their education 'strange' " (p. 12).² Helping my students understand oppressive practices as 'strange' rather than as acceptable modes of behaviour will help expose socially constructed practices based on privilege and rooted in social hierarchies that signify embedded systemic and institutionalized racism, sexism, and other forms oppression.

² Entry requirements differ across Universities in Canada and other countries. At the University of Saskatchewan, high school students may apply for a Direct Entry Program in the College of Education as soon as they are finished Grade 12. They can enroll in Music Education or Kinesiology. University of Saskatchewan, Admissions and Programs, 2005.

I benefited enormously because I witnessed the hard work my students engaged in to create a positive change in the learning environment. Most importantly, I got to know who my students were as individuals and I caught a glimpse of what they knew about school and relationships through their memory work and through their struggles to come to terms with defining their roles as individuals in a complex and challenging society. I could see that encouraging my students to engage in personal and emotional work about their own school days helped them to understand that their school relationships had been constructed to reflect particular social norms.

According to Burr (1995), “we construct our own and each other’s identities through our everyday encounters with each other in social interaction” and that “human beings together create and then sustain all social phenomena through social practices” (pp. 9-10). By examining their own memories through anti-oppressive educational theories, my students were learning to *deconstruct* attitudes and actions they previously thought were limited to and guided by random acts and individual behaviour traits. We were getting their *knowing* on the table. We could then examine their knowledge and move forward with how they came to know what they know. In other words they were beginning to understand that inequity, exclusion, and marginalization were linked to the more damaging and devastating aspects of oppressive practices that “limit access to full participation in society based on individual membership in a particular social group” (Adams et al., 1997, p.88). For example, when we examined ableism and able bodied privilege as discussed by Wendell (1989) in the course reading package, several students volunteered stories where they remembered the difficulties that students in wheelchairs had in navigating the classrooms and hallways of their elementary and high schools. As children, they assumed that this was just “normal” when one did not fit into an able-bodied society.

During the class discussion, students congratulated each other because they did engage in outright teasing or acts of meanness towards students who had disabilities. However, as I encouraged them to delve a little further into the relationships they may or may not have had with these students, no one could recall inviting the students with disabilities to birthday parties, trips to the mall

during lunch hour, nor did they remember seeing students with disabilities at school dances or other social functions. With that in mind, they began to recognize exclusionary practices that they had not thought of as such before. They wondered how they could have been so cruel and thoughtless. None of them could recall a teacher ever talking to them about any of these things.

Some of the young women in the class volunteered how even years later, they easily recalled how hurt they felt when they were not invited to attend outings and occasions like parties and get-togethers with other students. The class then discussed painful memories about being chosen last for sports teams or bullying other students because of their size or lack of athletic prowess. Several students voiced dismay and embarrassment that it was not until they recalled their own feelings of being hurt, or the part they played in hurtful behaviour towards others, that they could begin to contemplate Wendell's (1989) analysis of othering, social ostracization, the social construction of difference, and the expectations and privileges of the normal body (pp.106-120).

Another interesting layer to this discussion was added when one of my students said that he felt society had come a long way in addressing difficulties faced by people with physical disabilities. He pointed out that there were wheel-chair accessible ramps to many of the city's buildings, accessible public washroom facilities, Braille in elevators and so on. As the others were quick to agree, I asked them if they had ever been to the campus art gallery to view an exhibit, taken an art class upstairs in the same building or used the provincial archives located downstairs also in the same building. They were shocked when I explained that these services were all accessible only by stairs. I then asked them if they had ever had to retrieve a book from the highest shelf on any floor in the main library. As all of them had done so, we talked about how just being able to view the books on each shelf often led to important 'finds' that they did not notice in the library catalogue.

My point, obviously, was about the limits that people in wheel chairs face each day on our campus. That not one person in the class knew or even thought about physical access or the lack of it on campus made further discussion on the privileges experienced by dominant groups interesting, lively, and heartfelt. Many voiced concerns over the things they had not thought of or noticed, especially after I asked them whether or not this information would have been a surprise to the students on campus who do have physical disabilities.

Similar discussions took place through the remainder of the course as my students began to connect their own experiences within larger social constructs. They realized that they were beginning to understand “the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions” (Adams et al., 1997, p. 4). Through memory work, my students were realizing that rather than ignoring or complaining about discomfort they felt in locating themselves within at least some privileged groups, that they could use this discomfort to, as Thomas suggests, “pose new questions and to seek new insights” (p.172) about oppression and the school environment.

The Importance of Memories

Remembering the past was not just an attempt to see how I had been molded as a teacher by the teachers who had molded me; [but] it was an explanatory mission into the depths of my formation as a person, and it put me in touch for the first time, with the founding experiences of my life. It helped me discover what kind of person I had become as a result of those early school experiences, and even more, who I had been before they worked their will on me.

(Tompkins, 1996, p. xvi).

Tompkins quest to discover ‘what kind of person’ she had become because of her school experiences was an important aspect of understanding her identity as a teacher. Tracing the roots of our social relationships in the school environment is an invaluable exercise if we are, as teachers and teacher candidates, hoping to address the perpetuation of social injustices in the school environment.

Re/viewing school days through a filter of anti-oppressive educational theories, encourages us to order and select specific details about our experiences as schoolchildren.

Through memories and retrospection, it is possible to locate examples of how privilege, power, and a deeply-rooted sense of entitlement determined how we treated each other, even before we were mature enough to question for ourselves how our social environment was ordered. Human identities are evolving constructions that emerge out of continual social interactions during the course of our lives. The social experiences we all had as elementary, high school, and post-

secondary students began in the classroom, on the playground, and in university settings, must indeed influence the choices and perspectives we bring to the teaching profession. In other words, along with academic subjects, we were also immersed in what Tompkins (1996), describes as “non-intellectual modes of knowing,” that are often not closely examined as valuable learning tools in our institutions of education (p. xii). During their teacher education program, pre-service teachers are inundated with theories about teaching practice. There has been, at least in my experience, very little information offered to teacher candidates examining the very emotional and poignant examples of inequity that occurred between students and between teachers and students in the school environment.

My reasons for focusing on the ‘non-intellectual modes of knowing’ that Tompkins (1996) describes above are multi-layered. One reason is based on my own experiences as a graduate student in adult education. I learned that there was sometimes a difference between the theories and practice regarding adults and inclusive learning environments. The next reason is based on my experiences as an instructor in a teacher education program where I teach courses that are both from and about anti-oppressive educational perspectives. Another reason is a more personal one, in that I want my grandchildren to have teachers who understand the nature of exclusionary/inclusive practices and who desire to educate all students about social justice issues. I want them to experience a healthier school environment than their parents or I did. I hope that they will learn not to perpetuate hurtful practices based on our socially constructed concepts of viewing difference as a negative. I hope that my grandchildren will learn to be critically aware of social and political systems that limit some people while rewarding others. These concerns have led me to investigate how our past student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships reflected and created often hurtful and sometimes harmful associations that reinforced and rewarded hegemony. Currently, there is little information available to educators that examines the hurtful and sometimes devastating relationships between students and between teachers and students that shaped each of our understanding of who we thought we

were, who we were allowed to be, and who we were taught to be, as privileged and disadvantaged children and youth within the institution of education.

I am not suggesting that our memories about school experiences are all negative or that all acts of exclusion or marginalization are the same. Rather, I intend to show how important it is for teacher candidates to examine critically the times that were difficult in school in an effort to avoid creating or perpetuating similar oppressive practices for their students. Oftentimes through their memory work my students cited times when they were excluded from social activities, teased because they did not fit in to the prescribed social norms, or were insulted and became the object of sarcasm from teachers when they did not do well on an assignment or tests. By engaging in this type of research, I felt that stories from teachers (because we are all imperfect and learning beings) who used their own memories to recognize and address inequities and hurtful practices would encourage my students to take action against perpetuating oppressive practices in the future.

I did not want to run the risk of flattening out practices of exclusion and marginalization as if everyone's experiences regarding difference were the same. I feel, however, that by having students isolate harmful practices in the school environment, they are encouraged to recognize that these experiences are rooted in wider-ranging practices of dominance and social control. This is especially evident in students who share their experiences as being the bullies or at least part of a group that teased and marginalized others. Rofes (1995) says that the bully is the "key enforcer of social norms amongst children" (p. 79). He describes bullies as "having a specific social function. They define the limits of acceptable conduct, appearance, and activities for children. They enforce rigid expectations...to this day, their handprints, like a slap on the face, remain stark and defined on my soul" (p. 80). According to Rofes, it is crucial that teachers understand that bullying is not merely an individual act or a discipline problem. Rather, the practice of bullying is located within the larger social context of oppressive practice. Blumenfeld's (1992) recollection of his first day of Kindergarten where his teacher scolded him for crying when his mother left him in the classroom is a good

example of how stereotypes of gender behaviour and expectations are reinforced for children at a very early age. His teacher said, “Don’t cry. Only sissies and little girls cry” (p. 29). The teacher’s comments indicated the presence of troubling stereotypes regarding assumptions of gender roles and the devaluation of women, as both images were hurtful and limiting.

Rofes (1995) and Blumenfeld (1992) use their memories of school experiences to explain that children as early as five years old and younger are labeled as sissy and therefore ‘gay’ long before they may be aware of their own sexual orientation. In school, however, they are labeled by other children in ways that are negative and demeaning. Clearly, at very young age children engage in hurtful practices based on perceptions of difference regarding prescribed behaviour when it comes to gender. After discussing these articles in class, many students shared their memories about children who were teased and bullied because they did not meet with what everyone considered ‘normal’ male or female standards. Several students said they felt terrible because they remembered many circumstances where they engaged in bullying towards class members they thought were sissies, lesbian or gay.

My experiences through years of teaching anti-oppressive education indicate that students’ negative reactions are hard to categorize. For example, the topics of homophobia and heterosexism are very difficult for my students to talk about. The majority of students are silent and unresponsive when I first introduce heterosexism and homophobia as examples of oppression. What makes their reaction to sexual orientation education rather startling is that most students will accept the idea that they are heterosexist or homophobic without difficulty. It is as if these labels are justified and acceptable. Furthermore, to be labeled as being against homosexuality is okay for many, because lack of acceptance towards same sex-individuals is quite often situated within their religious beliefs. However, it is within the theories of anti-oppressive education where they learn that discrimination, stereotypes, and a lack of understanding about sexual orientation creates life altering, painful, and damaging experiences that many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered youth and adults share.

Through resources used within the course, students are able to identify the privileges that heterosexual people experience everyday, like the freedom to love without negative judgments about sexual orientation surfacing. They are surprised to learn that even assuming that heterosexuality is the norm is problematic. As Adams, (1999) argues, the trouble with heterosexuality, “is its taken-for-grantedness and its power as a regulatory sexual category” (p. 3). She points out that “we are yet to be free of heterosexuality as a powerful social, sexual, or political institution” (p. 171). Many of my students clung to the idea that they should not have to address issues of sexual orientation in their teaching, because it is such a personal aspect of one’s identity. On the other hand, as in the case of abilities and disabilities described earlier, many students suggested that things have changed in society’s attitudes about same-sex orientation, especially amongst post secondary students in a university setting. While I agreed that this might well be the case, I asked my students to take note of their surroundings in the college to see if they could identify anything that might indicate the presence of homophobia. I suggested that they begin with checking the washrooms, as I was already aware of what they would find. The next day the males in my class reported that men’s washrooms had “quite a lot” of graffiti that was clearly homophobic. There were insults and rants against homosexuals written on the bathroom walls. Words like “faggot,” “queer,” “sissy,” “dyke,” and “lesbo” were common, according to the males in the class.

The women in the class were shocked, as they found no graffiti in their washrooms, or, if there was graffiti it was insults like “so and so is a bitch.” There were a few hearts drawn in marker with “A loves B,” (which by the way, they noted, seemed to be about heterosexual couples) but that was all they found. My male students said that there were also racist graffiti towards Aboriginal students in the college in each of the men’s washrooms. This led to important discussions on homophobia, racism, and the idea that no one had thought it unusual to see racist or homophobic messages on bathroom walls until they put it into a framework of anti-oppressive education. I asked them why they had not mentioned the graffiti to me earlier, or if they had ever mentioned it to anyone else in

authority. They said that it was so commonplace, doing something about it did not occur to them. One of the students said it was just “background” and he said that no one paid any attention to it. I asked them to consider whether it would be “background” to the gay males or the Aboriginal men who used the washroom. I asked them to especially the message the graffiti was sending to the children who see these messages on the walls when they come to this building.

I discussed the graffiti in the men’s washroom with my Department Head and he called maintenance to have the washrooms re-painted. Unfortunately, within a few months, similar messages were again written on the walls of the men’s washrooms. That the homophobic and racist messages were only found in the men’s washrooms also opened up the discussion to gender differences and could certainly bear further study.

As we began to engage in the anti-racist aspect of the course material, my students reacted in different ways than they did to anti-heterosexism and anti-homophobia. While they accepted the idea that they may be homophobic or heterosexist, the students reacted strongly against the notion that they, as members of dominant society, are implicated in practices of racism. Britzman (1991) explains that in part, this response is because, “it is a time when one's past, present and future are set in dynamic tension” (p. 8). For many it is the first time in their lives they were challenged about their views on how they know themselves in the world. Carson and Johnson (2001) describe this ‘dynamic tension’ as a time when “the absence of secure knowledge awakens the ambivalences of cultural identity among students in a context that is already fraught with the uncertainties of forming identities as teachers” (pp. 259-260). Students’ negative reaction to anti-racist education does indicate an engagement with the subject material. It was clear that no one wanted to be thought of as racist, where as I discussed earlier, they did not mind being labeled as homophobic. At the very least, obvious discomfort with anti-racist education gives educators a place to begin their work. As Schick & St. Denis (2003) argue, “Most students are unprepared for a social and political analysis in which they cannot stand outside and view themselves in a neutral and objective manner” (p. 58). Some of that objectivity surfaced when my

students connected their memories of school as a comfortable and safe place because they realized they were represented by the dominant racial group in society.

I hoped that the discussions and stories my students and I shared about the past school experiences would help bridge the gap between us. Things certainly improved, but I was not sure that there was really enough time to gain significant ground. There were still a few complaints. Some students felt that the class should have been structured differently from the beginning. They complained that I did not seek out their opinions soon enough about the tension and disharmony in the classroom. Several students commented favorably on my willingness to listen to them and to hear them. I learned some important lessons about myself and about teaching.

Finding out whom the teacher candidates were as individuals and the ways in which they had learned to view schooling helped me to see them beyond the ways in which they are described in articles about student resistance. Certainly, the majority of my students were white, working to middle class, English speaking, able-bodied individuals who enjoyed unearned privilege and a comfortable place within the social order. However, through their memory work, my students also revealed that as young children and youth they were pliable, vulnerable, and acquiescent to the social systems that shaped and formed how they treated each other as individuals and groups within a school system that reflected the larger systems of dominance and power in society.

In other words, addressing or recognizing who a student thinks s/he is, is complex and difficult. Using memory work to examine our past relationships defined by society's views of difference based on race, class, gender, described in the quote below by Ellsworth, may help students move from negativity to a deeper understanding about *who they are* as teacher candidates and *who they will become* as practicing teachers. Challenging students to revisit their past from within the theories embedded in anti-oppressive pedagogy and seeing their reactions enabled me to, as Ellsworth (1997) suggests:

The mode of address in a particular pedagogical relation between teacher and student, curriculum and student, school and student is also invisible. It can be easily overlooked when "progressive" educators pose questions about power in education. But unlike many other vectors of power in schooling, the *terms of an address* are aimed precisely at shaping, anticipating, meeting, or changing whom a student thinks she is. And this is done in relation

to gender, race, sexuality, social status, ability, religion, ethnicity, and all those other differences that, at this historical moment, are used to make a difference in opportunity, health care, safety, sense of self, employment, quality of life (p. 7).

Summary

This chapter began with a story about the difficulties I experienced with student reacting negatively to the articles in course I taught on anti-oppressive pedagogy. Initially my research was undertaken to help me understand why my students seemed to be resisting the course material. After an exercise where my students engaged in memory work to explore the experiences they had as children and youth in schools, I learned a great deal about them as individuals growing up in an education system that did not always treat them well. I realized that I had been rather limited in the ways in which I had thought about their difficulties with anti-oppressive pedagogy. I wanted to know more about the kinds of experiences that went into forming my students' identity as teacher candidates. In this first chapter, I began a process that focused on the importance of memory work as a teaching and learning tool to help me understand who students were as individuals. At the same time, however, the memory work explored through my students' stories brought to light the influence their teachers had over the ways in which they viewed themselves and others in the world around them. I opened discussion in this chapter on experiences that showed teachers knowingly or unknowingly perpetuating oppression in the schools.

My students felt that they would benefit from the experiences of practicing teachers, who used the memories they had of their past schooling to help them in the practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy. In addition, needed to know more about the formation of teacher identity before I could form the questions and discussion areas needed to provide students with the stories from teacher participants in my study. A review of the literature that explores the importance of memory-work as an effective teaching tool in a teacher education

program, the social constructs that help shape teacher identity, and issues surrounding students' struggles with anti-oppressive pedagogy follows.

CHAPTER TWO: Review of the Literature

Through the review of the literature, I explored what scholars say about students' negative reactions to anti-oppressive education. I also examined the perceptions I had of my students as I observed their reluctance to engage in anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic pedagogy in my classroom. In doing both of these things, I was able to clarify why anti-oppressive education is so important in teacher education.

Students' Resistance and Social Identity

*Before the exercise in memory work, I had been caught up in what I **thought** defined my students' problematic response to the course I was teaching. I had taken on scholarly perspectives that defined their negative reactions as resistance. After my students shared their stories, I realized that there was a problem in my analyses of them. Although I was aware that thirteen weeks was not enough time to engage in an in-depth examination about racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other interlocking forms of oppressive practice, there was also more to it than that. I had been focusing on teaching them the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of anti-oppressive education but had not thought to help them personalize oppressive practice.*

Anti-oppressive educators have documented the negative reactions exhibited by students in courses similar to the one I am teaching. Many students become angry, defensive, and dismissive when they learn that as members of dominant groups in society, they are (as we all are) complicit in maintaining and perpetuating oppressive practices. Having observed resistance to anti-oppressive education amongst teacher candidates, I researched the experiences of other anti-oppressive educators to try to understand why my students were experiencing difficulties with the course material.

I looked to the scholars who analyze student resistance to anti-oppressive pedagogy for help in figuring out what to do with my students. According to the scholars who study how and why students resist, teacher candidates are seen mostly as a homogeneous group especially when it comes to "white" students resisting anti-racist education, for example. For the most part teacher education students enrolled in anti-oppressive education classes are

described as white with working class to middle class family backgrounds, academically successful, and upwardly mobile individuals (Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Solomon & Levine-Rasky 1996; Allsup, 1995; Sleeter, 1995; Tatum, 1992; Collins, 1991). African-American feminist Patricia Collins (1991) states that she just assumes that the oppressed for the most part do not attend university and that most students who are there experience at least some privileges ascribed to members of the dominant groups in society. High tuition fees, the many years of undergraduate and graduate work needed to obtain degrees, the cost of housing, books, transportation, and the cost of living in general limit and indeed make higher education impossible for many. Access to urban centres is also an issue, especially for those who live in rural areas, as most post-secondary institutions are located in larger cities.

Schick's (2000) suggests that teacher candidates from working-class backgrounds seek a career in teaching because they aspire to become middle-class, and that they, in part, seek, "middle-class respectability as teachers by performing particular raced, classed, and gendered identities that are both chosen and imposed in complex and often contradictory ways" (pp.299-300). She offers this analysis after going through a self-reflexive process where she examined her own desires in becoming a teacher and feels that while her experience does not represent all white female teachers, it quite likely reflects what at least others have gone through. Schick argues that for working-class women, teaching is seen as a way to make it "out" of a lower social class rather than as an opportunity to work against the social injustice that limits working class individuals in a capitalist society. Overall (1995) discusses her goal as a young child to make it "out" of the working class, which she accomplished by becoming a professor in a post-secondary institution. She stated, "At the age twelve I decided that education would be my way of avoiding a future as a waitress, factory worker, or clerk typist. If education was the ticket out, I was determined to get as far as I possibly could" (pp. 210-211). I wanted my students to consider the elitism embedded in such a statement.

In my classroom practice, I used Overall's article to have students identify the social constructs at work that has a twelve year old girl, Overall, assuming that something is wrong with blue-collar jobs like waitress, factory work, or clerk-typists and that the people worked in those fields were "less than" or "other than" and must be wanting "out." At issue are the assumptions that certain kinds of labour are not as worthwhile as labour that comes from engaging in higher education. While blue-collar labour often means hard work and low wages, so too can working in the field of post-secondary education, for example. The idea that young children learn to judge individuals negatively about the labour they are producing is something that can be challenged by teachers using anti-oppressive education theories.

Still, the students, for the most part, resisted the *idea* that our views on equity are at least in part, socially constructed. The idea that hard work would enable everyone access to the same social rewards was a hard one for them to give up. Schick (2000), Overall (1995) and many other scholars suggest that at a young age students are taught to accept that meritocracy, or the notion that through hard work, everyone has the same access to jobs, advancement, and opportunities for higher education (Schick & St. Denis 2003; Schick, 2000; Adams et al., 1997; Overall, 1995). This assumption ignores the roles that sex and gender, race, physical and mental abilities/disabilities have in limiting individuals chances for employment and or advancement.

Anti-oppressive pedagogy challenges students to consider that opportunities come to them, at least in part, because they are white, benefit from class-based opportunities, and because they have not had to face the barriers that those who do not belong to dominant groups in society face. As Adams et al. (1997) suggest there are "complex, multiple, cross-cutting relationships" where "oppression is manifested through racism, sexism, classism, anti-Semitism, ableism, and heterosexism, and the dimensions of experience that connect "isms" in an overarching system of domination" (p. 5). Most students are quick to understand that individuals belonging to minority groups experience racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of exclusion and are disadvantaged in many

ways through these practices. However, the idea that they experience privileges and advantages because they belong to dominant groups in society is a more difficult concept to grasp.

McIntosh (1998) says “my schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person, or as a participant in a damaged culture... whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow “them to be more like us” (p. 166). By examining their school memories, my students could point to situations where their teachers and schooling imposed upon them society’s dominant identifications without them being fully aware of negative implications for anyone else. Several of my students found that when they did their student teaching, there was little or no Aboriginal content in the curriculum. When they questioned this practice, they were told that there was no need for Aboriginal education because there were few or no Aboriginal students in the school. Other students described incidents where Aboriginal students in their class were singled out for questioning when things went missing in the classroom. Others referred to times when their co-op teachers said nothing when racist or sexist jokes were told in class. It is not my intent to blame teachers for not addressing the larger social systems being played out in the classroom. Rather, my intent is to help teacher candidates consider the *implications involved* when lack of awareness about racism, sexism, privilege, and other aspects of oppressive practices is evidenced by peer and teacher relationships.

As my students began to connect their school memories to the course material, patterns were emerging about their own life stories that I could draw from to help me better understand how complex their social identities were. The majority of the class appeared to be white, working-class to middle-class, able-bodied, Christian, female students who were involved in post-secondary education for at least three years. However, through their stories, I learned that there were students of mixed Cree and Canadian-European ancestry who did not reveal their Aboriginal heritage. They explained that they had witnessed their peers telling racist jokes and making derogatory remarks about Native people in general. They felt that students were comfortable engaging in racist practices because they thought there were no Native people in the class. A similar situation was

voiced by the students who disclosed their same-sex orientation to me. They would not “come out” to their peers, because they felt it was not safe to do so because of the homophobic attitudes prevalent amongst many. Some of my students were single parents struggling with enormous student debt, and disclosed that they had to use the local Food Bank at times to feed their children. They explained that they were afraid they would be recognized in the line-up to access food-bank services.

Several students were holding down two jobs to help pay for their tuition and they told me that sometimes they just did not have time to do the readings. One of my students told the class about a sibling who had taken his own life the year before and had left a note revealing his hopelessness that friends and family would ever accept his homosexuality. Another student shared her family’s difficulties due to the severe physical disabilities of her sister. She said that sometimes the readings had to come second to the constant care and attention her sister needed because her folks could not afford professional help. She also stated that sometimes she was just too tired to contribute to the class discussions and she worried that her lack of participation would be judged as disinterest.

These experiences, in part, influenced how my students either engaged in or did not try to meet the course expectations and requirements. I assumed that their lack of willingness to engage in the course material was based solely on their political and social designations that had to do with whiteness, class, and privilege. I saw that once they examined their own stories and memories through a lens of anti-oppressive theories they were better able to recognize the overarching social systems that used power and dominance to undermine and limit certain members of society, while privileging others based on race, class, and other designations.

There were, of course, students who recognized themselves as privileged members of dominant society and as we shared our stories they began to unpack the benefits they had enjoyed and had never considered as such. Interestingly, most of the students who shared their stories, no matter what their ascribed place in the social hierarchy at school, recalled taking part in hurtful practices towards others. Schick and St. Denis (2003) suggest that, “by requiring our students to examine their dominant identifications and the power relations through which they are produced, we see students engage in a difficult but necessary process in challenging the assumptions that normalize and naturalize inequality” (p. 67). In

order to assist students in “challenging assumptions that normalize” inequality, I used memory work to assist them in recognizing and personalizing their participation in oppressive practices.

Why Anti-oppressive Pedagogy?

I was teaching a course that exposes how racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and other oppressive practices are represented in the institution of education. I was asking teacher candidates to undertake Razack’s (1993) challenge that educators draw from anti-oppressive education theories to “help us examine how we are each *constituted* by an existing set of social arrangements,” (p. 45) that influence the ways in which “what we know, think, and feel are socially produced (p.45). Moreover, Adams et al. (1997) suggest that anti-oppressive education “provides a framework for questioning and challenging our practices and creating new approaches as we encounter inevitable problems of cooptation, resistance, insufficient knowledge, and changing social conditions” (p. 4). Kumashiro (2000) argues that anti-oppressive theories help educators in “understanding the dynamics of oppression and articulating ways to work against it” (p. 25). He defines oppressed people as “Other” and defines oppression as being treated differently based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation. This treatment may consist of “discrimination, harassment, physical and verbal violence, exclusion, and isolation” (p. 26). At the same time, Kumashiro argues that *oppression occurs when educators do not take action against these practices*. He suggests that recognizing oppression consists of “pointing to the recognizably harmful ways in which only certain students are treated in and by schools” (p. 27). Anti-oppressive pedagogy helps students to consider the ways in which society is ordered according to privilege and hierarchies that reward those who belong to mainstream or dominant groups while denying acceptance and opportunities to those who do not. Common to anti-oppressive educators is the goal of attaining social justice. Social justice education is, “a process and a goal” that “includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (Adams et al., 1997,

p. 3). As such, anti-oppressive education is about more than eliminating oppression.

While the goals of achieving social justice in the schools and society in general are admirable and desirable, teaching a course that employs anti-oppression education theories as a way to attain social justice is not as straightforward as one might imagine. Such a course continually challenges students to deconstruct or re/order social and personal relationships in ways that that they had never before considered were necessary.

Scholarly Wisdom: Why do Students Resist?

Previously, I explored the ideas, theories, and analysis regarding the experiences I had with students who refused to engage with anti-oppressive theories. Scholars suggest that while teacher candidates are likely to be from working-class to middle-class origins, their reasons for resisting certain types of information are complex, multilayered, and are intimately tied to complicated systems of dominance and identity positioning in a hierarchical society (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2005; Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Rottman, 2001; Schick 2000; Ellsworth, 1997; Briskin, 1994; Sleeter 1993; Collins, 1991). Schick & St. Denis (2003) argue that anti-racist education provides a most difficult challenge for white students. They suggest that students exhibit “denial of inequality, selective perceptions of reality, guilt, and anger, and at times withdrawal from learning” (p. 57). Schick and St. Denis explain that this resistance happens because, “Most think they are going to learn about the *cultural other*” (p. 56). Instead, they learn that the course is about them as it critically analyzes the sense of entitlement dominant groups have about their perceived place in the social hierarchy.

According to the Schick and St Denis (2003) students do not wish to hear that they have knowingly or unknowingly perpetuated systems of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other oppressive practices. Williams (2001) shares some of the difficulties she experienced when she learned through a graduate course on anti-racist education, the roles white people play in the perpetuation of racism in society:

It made a personal impact that has changed my way of understanding my life experiences as a white person...certainties and firmly held positions, my sense of self, of others, of history, of identity, race, class, gender, and so on crumbled around me. I felt disoriented and wasn't sure what I believed anymore, as I was faced with information that pointed out the inconsistencies between how our actions measure up to our stated beliefs. This was a painful time in my university studies, but also a time when I gained insight (p. 2).

The disorientation and the painful time that Williams refers to above resonated with me and mirrored my own experiences as a white woman coming to terms with the pervasive nature of racism in our schools. Schick and St. Denis (2003) propose that, "...the coming to race consciousness for white education students ... is difficult for both those who learn and those who teach. We acknowledge that a great deal is at risk for students' self-perceptions in that the course challenges explanatory frameworks and commonsense ideological assumptions that students hold dear and that serve them well" (p. 67). The "ideological assumptions that serve them well" are also described by McIntosh (1998) as systems of interlocking oppressions that offer white people advantages and conferred dominance that we are taught not to see (pp. 166-168). Razack (1998) points to the "interlocking systems of domination" where each system of oppressive practice relies on the other to strengthen and normalize exclusionary practices (p. 12). Adams, et al., (1997) feel that "As we move towards an understanding of the interlocking nature of different forms of oppression, we can also trace connections among movements that may not have been as clearly visible then as they now are in hindsight" (p. 6).

I believe that the knowledge obtained through retrospection comes from critical analysis of our memories where we begin to identify racist practices in our schools. For the most part standard curricula did not reflect diversity nor did it encourage students to have respect for difference. There was the high ratio of white teachers to non-white teachers, and there was an absence of non-white administrators within the institution of education. This situations exemplifies discrimination and exclusionary practice (Schick & St. Denis 2003; Banks, 1996; Connell, 1993; Sleeter, 1993). In terms of racial dominance and privilege

embedded in society's institutions like education, McClintock (1995) argues that the privileges white people assume should not be seen as "the invisible norm, but the problem to be investigated" (p. 8). Anti-oppressive pedagogy demands such investigation. Kumashiro (2000) states that:

Rather than aim for understanding of some critical perspective, anti-oppressive pedagogy should aim for effect by having students engage with relevant aspects of critical theory and extend its terms of analysis to their own lives, but then critique it for what it overlooks or for what it forecloses, what it says and makes possible as well as leaves unsaid and 'unthinkable' (p. 39).

Kumashiro's suggestion that we encourage students to extend critical theories relevant to anti-oppressive pedagogy to their own lives is an important perspective to explore. McIntosh (1998) argues that while differing oppressive practices like racism, classism, and gender discrimination do parallel each other, advantaging associations are not the same. McClintock (1995) suggests that practices of oppression "exist in intimate, reciprocal, and contradictory relations"(p. 5). The social dynamics referred to by McIntosh and McClintock and others are important to clarify for teacher candidates. The idea is to challenge teacher candidates' propensity to deny that racism exists in schools today and to encourage them to recognize how they are situated in various locations within the intimate, reciprocal, and contradictory relations described by McClintock.

Chizhik and Chizhik (2005) examined student perceptions of oppression and privilege, in order to help understand their resistance to social justice education. To help students better sort out their own notions about oppression and privilege the authors asked students to define social power relationships and multicultural issues. They also asked students if they considered themselves privileged or oppressed. Chizhik & Chizhik state that, "we believe instructors should have some understanding about the preconceived notions that students bring with them to a social justice course to maximize intersubjectivity and dialogic conversation while minimizing resistance" (p. 120). Student resistance is defined as the inability of white mainstream upwardly mobile teacher candidates to accept that as privileged members of society they have been taught *not to see*

their own privilege. Because of this they have likely participated in racist, sexist, classist and other oppressive acts (Schick & St. Denis 2003; Adams et al., 1997; Cochran-Smith, 1995). However, Chizhik & Chizhik found that:

Resistance to social justice discourse may be students holding different definitions from their instructors of key social justice terms, including privilege and oppression. Our data shows that students tend to hold simple views of their status, rather than more complex views typical to social justice educators...Instructors therefore need to be aware of students' preconceptions, and build new knowledge through intersubjectivity (p.136).

Interestingly, the data show that the majority of students in the study defined themselves as privileged whether they were white or non-white. Chizhik & Chizhik suggest, "students of color may hold a different definition of those two terms, and therefore, they label themselves differently than how educators would label them" (p. 137). Chizhik and Chizhik's (2005) data argue that there are variances in the resistance to social justice education based on the social groups where students see themselves placed.

Their research suggests that white males are least likely to recognize oppression and oppressive practices. They state that this is because, "these students have the biggest conceptual changes to make; they may be most likely to resist social justice discourse that encourages such a conceptual change"(p.137). Chizhik and Chizhik conclude:

Our findings are insufficient to offer fully substantiated explanations. Specifically the current research study does not investigate the actual similarities and differences among students' and instructors' conceptions of social justice constructs. Future research therefore should compare students' and instructors' beliefs about these issues in relation to the amount of perceived and actual resistance in the course. Such findings will begin to unearth the causes for students' resistance to social justice issues as well as to offer suggestions as to how instructors can avoid students' ideological or pedagogical resistance to social justice education... Teacher education programs need to be cognizant of the intersection between discourse and students identity formation in terms of their willingness to engage in terms of transformative education

for social justice...Assessing and challenging students' prior beliefs and conceptions becomes influential...as well as essential for effective social justice education (p.139).

In order to unearth the causes for students' resistance to social justice education as suggested by Chizhik and Chizhik, we need to find out as much as possible about our students as individuals and as teacher candidates. I experienced a shift in how my students related to the course materials after we shared stories and memories about their schooling. By critically analyzing their memories through anti-oppressive pedagogy, my students recognized the presence of large social systems in the school environment. My students identified racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression, that they had previously thought were simply individual acts of meanness. One student asked if this meant that as children - they were racist, sexist, homophobic, before they even knew what the words meant. Many students echoed similar concerns. This led to interesting and lively discussions on the formation of their identity as adults and as teachers who could easily perpetuate the same kind of relationships their teachers had with them as they were growing up.

The concerns of my students clearly reflected the need to address what Chizhik and Chizhik (2005) described above as "intersection between discourse and student identity formation" (p.139). The authors conclude that there are, as Tatum (1992) suggests, few white people visibly involved in anti-racist activism. In this regard, teacher candidates may feel that there is not enough support for them to engage in anti-racist education. Over the last ten years, anti-racist and other forms of anti-oppressive education has garnered more support and available resources from local school boards and teacher associations. The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF), has made a number of resources available that focus on diversity and equity as it applies to students and teacher knowledge and ethical responsibility. Members of the STF are available as guest lecturers for the College of Education where they distribute resources to teacher candidates. The STF offers teachers in Saskatchewan an extensive resource list of reading material and teaching aids that are intended to "help bring about a more harmonious Canada

that acknowledges its racist past, recognizes the pervasiveness of racism today, and is committed to creating a future in which all Canadians are treated equitably and fairly” (Erlandson, 2002, p. 50). These resources will support the efforts of teachers engaging in anti-oppressive pedagogy. They are also made available to teacher candidates to help them understand that they do not have to work alone as anti-oppressive educators.

Critical exploration of their past school experiences helped these teacher candidates understand how *and why* they either experienced, participated in, or at the very least witnessed unjust and oppressive practices in the school environment. The exercise helped me too. Through their memory work, I began to see how incredibly complex their identities were as individuals in a teacher education program and I better understood the ways in which their knowledge about oppression had been constructed.

Ellsworth (1997) states, “Pedagogy as a social relationship is very close in. It gets right in there-in your brain, your body, your heart, in your sense of self, of the world, of others, and of possibilities and impossibilities in all those realms” (p. 6). Instructors in teacher education programs have two major tasks to consider. First, we must address the relationships we have with our own students. How do we engage with them beyond the theoretical and methodological information we must provide them? Secondly, how do we encourage them to engage in education for social justice so that their students will benefit from inclusive and informed teaching practices? From where does one gather the strength, the knowledge, and the ability to engage in seeking social change? The anti-oppressive education theories explaining whiteness, privilege, oppression, racism, sexism, and heterosexism learned through my graduate studies have been crucial to my development as an educator.

Learning about these theories raised my consciousness about oppression and oppressive practices. However, the most significant change had to do with identifying my own perspectives about personal and social relationships. I began a process that helped me address and bridge the gap between theory and practice. I think it is essential to explore “teaching and learning that is not just task oriented

but always looking over its shoulder at everything that is going on around. Such a method would never fail to take into account that students and teachers have bodies that are mortal, hearts that can be broken, spirits that need to be fed” (Tompkins, 1996, p. xiii). I believe that not only must we teach our future teachers to recognize that their students will have “spirits that need to be fed” but, that we also need to look at them the same way.

How do the actions or inactions of those in authority contribute to how students treat each other and how teachers treat students based on difference, conformity, acceptance, and exclusion? Anti-oppression educator Kumashiro (2000) reminds us that teaching goes well beyond lesson plans and prescribed curricula:

What students learn results not only from what teachers teach intentionally, but also from what teachers teach unintentionally and often unknowingly, and different students "learn" different things, depending on the lenses, they use to make sense of their experiences. These hidden lessons about the subject matter, about schooling, and about broader social relations are always permeating our schools, emerging from our silences, behaviors, curricular structures, institutional rules, cultural values, and so forth. Often reflecting the status quo or norms of society, they are experienced as parallel norms of schooling, as the ways things are and perhaps should be. And, because of their everyday nature, these hidden, unintentional lessons often have greater significance than the intentional ones (pp.26-27).

Examples of the “hidden and unintentional lessons” Kumashiro refers to tumbled out of my students memories through the exercise in remembering the day-to-day relationships they had in the classrooms, hallways, and schoolyards during their elementary and high school years.

When I stepped away from the lectures and group work on the theoretical aspects of anti-oppressive pedagogy and asked my students to explore the personal spaces they occupied as children and youth in a troubled school system, they responded by sharing and analyzing their memories. A process of merging the personal and the theoretical began to take shape. I found this to be a humbling

experience. Until I had reached that point with my students, I had been relying too much on the course Reading Package to explain how oppressive practice functions in society. I realized that students were not making personal connections to the theories they were learning.

Freire (1970) would describe this method of educating as “banking knowledge” (pp. 52-58). He was concerned that teachers lectured too much, thereby depositing information in the students heads the same way they deposit money in bank account. Freire said that, “instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits ... which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance” (p. 52). What makes Freire’s observations particularly useful in anti-oppressive education is that:

It follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator’s role is to regulate the way the world ‘enters into’ the students. The teachers task is to organize a process which already occurs spontaneously to ‘fill the students by making deposits of information which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge (p.57).

As Freire says, we expect the world (in this case, anti-oppressive education) to enter into students’ consciousness, instead of finding ways to have them enter into anti-oppressive consciousness.

Teacher Candidates as Adult Learners

MacKeracher (1996) suggests that traditionally there has been a “separateness tendency,” (p. 20) when it comes to educating adult learners. She explains that educators expect adult learners to exhibit “a sense of autonomy, independence and personal control over one’s life. Learning related to this tendency focuses on meanings, strategies, and skills required to function independently” (p. 20). Throughout my four-year honors program in the College of Arts and Science, I took a variety of courses within the disciplines of Sociology, Religious Studies, Native Studies, and Women’s and Gender Studies. As an adult in an undergraduate program at a post-secondary institution, the majority of my

classes were delivered lecture style. Exceptions were the disciplines of Women's and Gender Studies and in one or two of the Native Studies courses. Professors in these classes included interactive group work, class outings, and guest speakers. These professors encouraged students to write in journals about our learning experiences, they encouraged us to voice our opinions, and they expected us to participate in the discussions of the course material.

MacKeracher (1996) argues that rather than relying on the lecture method of teaching, we should encourage our students to relate interactively to the course material. She states that this leads to "a sense of affection for others, interdependent behaviour, and connectedness to others. Learning related to this tendency includes personal and shared meanings and values as well as the skills necessary to function interactively and collaboratively with others" (p. 20). MacKeracher argues that adult learners learn best when "they are treated in ways which are consistent with their existing description of who they are...that others respect and acknowledge their past experiences...and that their learning bears some relationship to past experiences and can be connected to their existing meanings and personal model or reality" (p. 28). I witnessed this when my students began to re/visit the past and examine their peer and student/teacher interactions, they were astonished at the emotions evoked through their memories.

Recalling pain, embarrassment, hurt feelings, isolation, or shame at remembering their own part in causing discomfort for others served as a spring board for discussion about deeply disturbing episodes that most of them had written off as having a bad day. Discussions emerged about the damaging effects and pain caused to individual students that the deeply embedded acceptance and practices of racism, sexism, class hierarchies, homophobia and other forms of oppression evident in the school environment. My students voiced that after locating examples of oppressive practice in their own school experiences, they were willing to return to the theories they had earlier dismissed.

If we are to engage teacher candidates in meaningful ways regarding anti-oppressive pedagogy, we cannot dismiss or ignore the social construction involved in forming their identities as members of dominant groups in society. However, as

teacher educators, we must find out who else our teacher candidates are. Ellsworth (1997) says that educators are socialized to categorize students according to who we *think* are students are? She suggests that::

Social and economic status, gender, and physical “attractiveness” were the operative markers of difference in who was “in” and who was “out,” who was expected to be “bright” and who was expected to be “slow” in the small overwhelmingly white, working-class-to-lower-working-class Euro-American ethnic city on Milwaukee’s near south side (p. 2).

Ellsworth says that these markers were “taken up by teachers and students as bases for sorting and grading, rewarding and ignoring, celebrating and marginalizing, disciplining and stylizing were not all that blatant or nameable...they were elusive, traditional, taken for granted, well intentioned, commonsensical and even unconscious” (pp. 2-3). These markers were however, what helped shape and form our identities as students and cannot help but influence us as teachers.

Ellsworth (1997) asks us to consider how teachers can make a difference in the ways in which they address their students. She argues that, “all modes of address misfire one way or the other.... pedagogy is a much messier and more inconclusive affair than the vast majority of our educational theories and practices make it out to be”(p. 8). She says, “the pedagogical relation between student and teacher is a paradox...and is unpredictable, incorrigible, uncontrollable, unmanageable, disobedient” (pp. 8-9). The author concludes her discussion at this point by stating that we can address students in ways that do not require them to “assume a fixed, unified singular position within power and social relations in order to read and respond to the address being offered”(p. 9). By applying Ellsworth’s logic to the theories that define teacher candidate resistance to anti-oppressive pedagogy, I realize that educators could benefit greatly by expanding on what we *think* we know about our teacher candidates. Defining teacher candidates as white, working to middle-class, and belonging to dominant groups in society is not inaccurate, but it does not really tell us enough about them as individuals. These students are also people who are vulnerable, impressionable, and shaped by schooling that did not encourage critical review of itself. Ellsworth

suggests that instructors in teacher education programs try to understand our teacher candidates by employing perspectives that “*multiply and set in motion* the positions from which they can be met and responded to” (p. 9). Ellsworth asks teacher educators:

To explore the meanings and uses of pedagogical modes of address that *multiply and set in motion* the positions from which they can be “met” and responded to, The point is modes of address that multiply and set in motion modes of address that set in motion who they think I am as a student and as a teacher. *That’s* what I think I needed in school and what I need today as a teacher. Moving modes of address that think of me as simultaneously, boy and girl, black and white, in and out, queer and straight, fat and thin, learning and knowledgeable, excited and scared, capable and incapable, interested and bored, trusting and suspicious. Modes of address that take on the responsibility for doing the necessary work of speaking to and about-but undecidedly so (p. 9).

In other words, Ellsworth challenges educators to recognize that students and teachers are complicated individuals who mirror and experience all possible social arrangements or categories that define who they are in the world. She is saying that we can respond to the social and personal issues that influence adolescence and teenage angst, but that the roles and labels we assign each other during our student/teacher relationships are not static but are constantly in flux.

Britzman (1986) suggests that:

the time and the place in which teacher education is currently rooted reflects its nineteenth-century origins... it ignores the cultural baggage carried by new student teachers...they bring their implicit institutional biographies – the cumulative experiences of school lives-which in turn inform their knowledge of the students’ world (p. 443).

Her analysis applies to teacher candidates, as they are both student and teacher at the same time. She suggests that student teachers (or teacher candidates) are constantly trying to make sense of the dilemmas they face when their underlying values and the ways in which they know the world come into play and conflict in

the classroom. Anti-oppressive pedagogies are designed to help students identify social stratification and exclusionary practices so that they will hopefully avoid perpetuating “the cultural reproduction of authoritarian teaching practices and naturalize the contexts which generate such a cycle” (p. 443). Britzman discusses the importance of understanding biography as way to empower teachers. She says that, “Exploring the internal world of prospective teachers requires a journey into biography and an understanding of the contexts through which the future teacher progresses” (p. 452). Britzman believes that students feel disequilibrium when they come across knowledge unfamiliar or threatening to their sense of who they are as individuals in school environment. She suggests that students see this disequilibrium as a threat and that they engage in resistance to avoid losing their balance.

Britzman (1986) draws from Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) to suggest that education students “examine their own histories, those connections to the past which in part define who they are and how they mediate and function in the world” (p.160). My experiences with trying to engage my students more productively in anti-oppressive pedagogy has taught me much about the relationships between teachers and students and about my own development as an instructor.

Teacher Identity

Educators in teacher education programs must develop strategies that encourage seeing our own students beyond the limiting nature of labels ascribed to them based on their positions as privileged subjects in the social order. In order to better understand how our teacher candidates represent themselves, we must accept that they are participants and co-learners who will at times resist in engaging with anti-oppressive pedagogy, and who will at other times acquiesce or choose neutral positions. They may also choose activism, accept their privileges, feel excluded, display enthusiasm, appear jaded, be enthusiastic, be cautious or will throw caution to the wind. Ellsworth’s (1997) philosophies regarding the power of address allow us to see the multiple versions of our students as teacher

candidates and us as teacher educators:

The question of address underlies educators' discussions about curriculum as text; the resistances that students and teachers put up against "official" school knowledge; the gendered, raced, and classed interpretations that students and teachers make of official school curricula; multiculturalisms; how students' and teachers' cultural positioning shape what counts as school knowledge; and the ways that the knowledges that get constructed about and by teachers and students affect their material and daily lives in school (p.10).

By recognizing the multiple constructions my students were embodying, my own views about them as white, middle class, and privileged individuals were altered. It was no longer sufficient to say that whiteness and privilege defined their resistance. Rather, it was important to acknowledge the degree to which they were influenced by the un-named and unchallenged oppressive practices in their past schooling. By getting in touch with their past, my students began to understand that oppressive practices took place all through their schooling even though it was not defined as such. They then began to connect personal experiences to the theories embedded in anti-oppressive pedagogy and began to consider the importance of using these theories in their own teaching practice.

Summary

In this literature review, I explored the strengths and limitations surrounding scholars' interpretations of students' negative reactions to anti-oppressive education. To understand the needs of my students as learners, I explored issues that define teacher candidates as adult learners and the factors that enter into the creation of their teacher identities. This literature review became a roadmap for me. Having explored the terrain, I found that as the researcher, I too became the researched. Britzman (1996) asks, "Can a study of the self studying education create new conditions of learning and the making of pedagogical insight?" (p. 119). My own experiences teaching an anti-oppressive course meshed with that of other instructors and with the current literature on anti-oppressive pedagogy. Students' resistance to the study of racism, sexism, heterosexism,

ableism, and other areas of oppression is well documented. However, based on the experiences I have had with resistance from my own students, I think that the current focus on teacher candidates provides only a partial perspective on who they are as individuals in the world. Britzman (2003), Ellsworth (1997), and Tompkins (1996) recognized that our teaching methods should come under scrutiny when encountering resistance from teacher education students.

Presently much of the literature regarding teaching anti-oppressive education focuses on addressing issues of power and privilege of dominant groups in society. Schick and St. Denis (2003) suggest more widespread attention to dominant and subordinate power relations, to help students better understand how and where we are all situated within oppressive practices. Britzman suggests that there is a difference “between learning about an experience, culture, or event and learning *from* one’s own reading of an experience, culture, or event...learning something from an engagement is of a different order than learning something about it” (p. 119).

The literature review helped prepare me for Parts Two and Three of my thesis, where I draw from my own experiences regarding oppression as a child and youth in the school system and then uses the same process to examine past schooling experiences of practicing teachers. This was done, as Britzman suggests, to develop a new awareness through the critical re/reading of past school experiences and provide information that may help educators make their own personal connections to the theories embedded in anti-oppressive pedagogy.

PART TWO

The following is a retrospective analysis of my school memories which, when viewed through a lens of anti-oppressive education theories uncovers oppressive practices that no one defined as such when they happened. By re/membering incidents from my past schooling, theories that explore class issues, sexism, and other forms of oppression within anti-oppressive pedagogy are exemplified.

CHAPTER THREE: My Story

*The birds of the forest do bitterly weep,
Saying where shall we shelter, where shall we sleep?
For the oak and the ash are all cutten down,
And the walls of Bonny Portmore are all down to the ground*
Traditional Irish Folksong

Although I have not yet visited the homeland of my Irish ancestors, the lyrics to the traditional folk-song above stir something within me that recognizes the sadness and loss my Irish grandmothers and grandfathers knew at the hands of their oppressors. My father's ancestors experienced the loss of their traditional lands, they endured laws that threatened the use of their Irish language, their knowledge about their Celtic spirituality and folklore. As Irish people, they were racialized, classified, and forced into gendered and subservient roles evident in the colonization practices by the British government all over the world. They embraced willingly or perhaps through the results of centuries of indoctrination, a patriarchal and hierarchal Catholic belief system that would shape and form their family, social, and educational institutions. At the same time, my ancestors did not fully accept acculturation. They shared stories of resistance and they instilled pride in their descendants about their Irish identity. My father decided to leave the oppressive conditions, immigrating to Canada because he wanted to work and raise a family in a place where, he assumed, that opportunities to succeed were not limited by heritage and culture.

I know very little about my mother's ethnic heritage. She was born in New York City in 1913, but was placed in a Catholic orphanage as an infant. Her birth certificate indicated that her parents were unmarried and she never learned anything about them as she was growing up nor did she pursue learning about her past as an adult. One of my brothers discovered, after an extensive genealogical search, that at least one of our mother's parents was Jewish. My mother was raised Catholic though, and would have had many years of catechism in her stay

at the convent/orphanage where she would have learned to pray for the conversion of the Jews and perhaps would have been exposed to anti-Semitic views. The history of her Jewish ancestors was, like my father's Irish history, one of oppression, discrimination and cultural, spiritual, and ethnic genocide.

I feel an emotional connection to my Irish and Jewish ancestors, which, I feel, provides me with an inherent understanding of their experiences and instills in me, a strong desire to work against oppression and towards social justice in my own life. Educator and Métis Elder, Maria Campbell (1998), describes this type of connection to the past, as 'genetic memory,'³ or the transmission of feelings and emotions from past generations to new generations, much the same way eye colour and other physical traits are also transmitted or inherited. Although there may not be any scientific basis for this explanation, it does help me understand the connection I feel to my family of origin, to their country, and to the past. Accepting this un-scientific explanation, after being conditioned by many years in the formal education system to accept only scientific 'truths' about biology and genetics, represents just one step in my own post-secondary educative process that has been more profoundly influenced by what I have had to unlearn rather than by what I have learned.

I have had to dismantle decades old assumptions about my own schooling and my understanding of the world. I was taught through implicit and explicit means that the education system I was part of was fair, unbiased, and objective and that the teachers were neutral participants in an educative process, which used a standard format meant to convey the same meaning for everyone. It would be many years before I would understand that school knowledge was indeed a reflection of specific arrangements in society. Rather than being an objective space

³ Métis Elder Maria Campbell's use of the word 'genetic' refers to a strong and very real 'felt' connection to our ancestors. Her Cree and Métis Elders taught her that emotions and feelings are also passed down through the decades and are as real as any inherent physical characteristics. An academic critical analysis may argue that this connection could also mean that feelings like hatred and racism could be passed down through the generations as well. However, I believe and have been advised by Indigenous scholars that it is important that Elders' knowledge offers a parallel process that fits lived experience and meaning to academic constructs. Their words should be accepted from the spirit and context within which they are offered without attempting to deconstruct them according to present day academic standards. To change a term used by an Aboriginal Elder is disrespectful and would only reflect the colonizer practice interpreting Aboriginal knowledge to fit institutionalized concepts.

within which knowledge was imparted, it was more like a series of structures built to protect and safeguard me as a member of dominant society.

My teachers all reflected their own socially constructed identities as members of mainstream society, which in turn informed their teaching, practice and from which we all learned to learn (Banks, 1996). The metaphoric “cutten down oak, ash, and the walls all down to the ground,” from the Irish folk-song symbolizes a dramatic un/learning process for me. It was when I saw that “walls” built from certain kinds of knowledge were crumbling around me, and that there was indeed “no place to shelter, no place to sleep,” that my formal education about oppression *really* began. Recognizing that oppressive practices inside and outside the schools were constructed to reflect and reward mainstream groups and individuals in society, to me, was the first step towards a deconstruction process that encouraged me to un/learn what I had been taught. This un/learning process left me forever changed as an individual, it repositioned my understanding of my own identity as a classed, gendered, sexualized white woman and it continues to influences every aspect of my life, especially my role as an instructor in a Teacher Education Program.

Earlier I described a situation where I asked my students to share memories from their past school days. I began to document my own memories at this time as well. In addition, when I was researching the material for my literature review, I began to re/collect my own stories and I remembered the feelings of exclusion and isolation I experienced throughout my school years. Analyzing memories in specific ways helped me to understand the roles my educators and peers had in helping form my identity as a raced, classed and sexualized individual in society. As stated in the introduction, Norquay (1993) suggested that transformation occurs for individuals when we learn to recognize the power of social positioning based on constructs of race, class, gender, and other socially constructed social hierarchies. She describes this process as “an analysis of the social and historical forces that have influenced how I have lived in the word. By interrogating how I have constructed myself, and have been constructed...I can return to the present with a new understanding of how to bring

about change” (p. 249). This process is described as “re/membering,” (p. 241) which encourages us to better understand the ways in which, dominant practices have worked to conceal our involvement in oppressive acts.

The most important result of doing the memory-work that Norquay encourages is that while I did indeed remember harmful and hurtful experiences, I also participated in treating other students in harmful and hurtful ways. Britzman (1996) describes the process of recognizing and personalizing oppressive practice in the school environment as, “learners implicating themselves in their learning” (p. 117) in order to establish “pedagogy that shapes how teachers respond and listen to students, and how students respond and listen to teachers” (p. 117). Making meaning of experience requires that we, as Tompkins (1996) suggests, turn our gaze inwards to “address the need for purpose and connectedness to ourselves and one another” (p. xvi). Remembering how it felt to be connected and/or disconnected to others as a child in the school system has influenced me as an anti-oppressive educator. I think that by sharing our stories we will encourage teacher candidates to use their past school experiences to help inform their teaching practice as anti-oppressive educators. By examining the past, we pay tribute to adult learning through experience and memory. With narratives we encourage students to bring a theoretical analysis to remembered experiences to understand our roles in the production of dominance, identity, and the influence this understanding has on the shaping of our teacher identities as anti-oppressive educators.

Noticing Difference

The teacher [is] the one whom you must obey, the one who exacts obedience. For obedience is the basis for everything else that happens in school: unless the children obey, nothing can be taught (Tompkins, 1996, p. 4).

One of the first memories I have about school is about a little boy, Ray (pseudonym) who was in the first grade with me. He was very shy and unsure of himself. Ray did not make friends with any of us and he would often cry if Sister B called on him in class. I remember thinking that I was glad I was not he. Ray

was even too shy to raise his hand to go the washroom and of course, the inevitable happened. The puddle appeared under his desk and our teacher, Sister B was not pleased. I remember how angry she was at Ray and she told him that only babies did that. She said that all of us grade ones were to call him *Baby Ray* from that day on. Of course, we did just that. Because this young boy was different, he became an object of terrible teasing and bullying. I participated in this too, even though I felt sorry for him and always felt guilty for the role I played in making his elementary school years miserable.

I remember Ray as a loner throughout high school too. The difficult thing about remembering this particular incident is not that we were influenced by a course of action as small children, but that we continued treating Ray badly even when we were in high school and should have known better. In remembering this incident, I wonder if my teacher saw him as weak or did she think he was challenging her authority in some way? I learned as a first grader that it was not good to be different. Norquay (1993) helped me understand that, “difference is never merely a descriptive term, it always signifies a social relation of domination/subordination, reproduction/resistance. Differences do not simply exist; they are constructed and all constructions of difference are integral to power relationships” (p. 243). How did the actions of the teacher in this situation shape harmful practices towards one student who did not fit the norm? How were the rest of us also harmed by our participation in ensuring that social norms were enforced when Ray could not meet them?

Class Issues

If they are not sitting on benches in the park then they do not live at the Scott Mission. If they have groceries, they live in a room with a hot- plate. The hot plate appalls Ann. It renders her speechless with pity. The rooms those lonely beings enter, then, are empty except for one dangerous plate - glowing, hot, and offensive. These old men and women take their groceries home, struggling up dark staircases enter a shabby room and lean, wheezing, against the wall while they regard with sorrow that single piece of burning crockery. Such is the fate of the thoroughly betrayed (Urquhart, 1990, p. 30).

My father died three months before I was born. My mother was in her late thirties at the time and I was the youngest of thirteen children. I was born in the early 1950s and while some of my older brothers and sisters had already left home, there were enough of us still at home that my mother, like many women of her generation, did not have a job outside the home. My siblings and I were “welfare” kids and we carried the stigma of being labeled as poor and lower class. While I never knew the poverty and despair that Jane Urquhart (1990) describes in the above quotation, I am haunted by her words, “Such is the fate of the thoroughly betrayed” (p. 30). Looking back at the experiences of Ray and other incidents where a teacher caused harm in the school environment, I realized that this type of behaviour is an act of betrayal to the child involved. In my own experience, I was often teased for being poorly dressed and for not having money for books or field trips. Every September we were asked to write a composition about how we spent our summer holidays. I dreaded handing in my essay because we never went on trips or, as it seemed to me then, did anything worth writing about.

I attended a Catholic elementary school and later a Catholic high school with the same group of students from grades one through twelve. By about the sixth grade, my peers began to tease me about my second-hand clothes, the haircuts my older sisters gave me, and for other reasons too. I recall once that my best friend’s mom gave me a dress that my friend had out-grown. I loved her blue velvet dress and I could not wait to wear it to school. However, at recess, one of the other girls in the class started taunting me; “that’s J’s old dress, that’s J’s old dress” and soon all the others were laughing and joining in. I never wore the dress again, but it seemed like the other kids always found *something* wrong with me. School became a dreaded and very painful place for me. I often pretended to be sick so I could stay home. I know that I cried in class sometimes and at recess too when I was either left out of skipping or other games. My male sixth grade teacher never intervened although he witnessed much of the teasing, cruel remarks, and exclusion I experienced. When I finally got up enough

courage to talk to him about how I was feeling, he said “well, maybe if your mom bought some nicer clothes for you, they would treat you better.” At the time, I could not name the stigma attached to being singled out or excluded based on family finances or anything else as a child, but I certainly felt it. Looking back through memory work, I realize that there were larger social systems at work. I internalized what was happening and experienced what Adams, et al., (1997) describe as, “...the idea that poor people somehow deserve and are responsible for poverty, rather than the economic system that structures and requires it, is learned by poor and affluent alike” (p. 5). I felt that our situation must be entirely my mother’s fault. Although my experiences were class based, O’Reilly’s (1996) investigation of motherhood as a racialized social construct helps me understand my feelings of shame (eventhugh we were white) and wanting to blame my mother. O’Reilly argues that, “dominant ideologies and discourses of mothering and motherhood...represent only one experience of mothering, that of white middle-class women, and position this experience as the real, natural, and universal one” (p. 88). All this was happening to me because my family was poor and therefore *different* from my peers’ families.

Lorde (1984) states that difference is usually defined as deviance by dominant society and it “sets up simplistic opposites: good/bad, superior/inferior, insider/outsider” (p. 114). At a very early age, I internalized shame about my family’s economic stratification. In the fourth grade one of my friends told me that my family was poor. She asked if she could come home with me because she wanted to see how “the poor” lived.

When I look back at these experiences, two issues stand out. One is about the responsibilities teachers have in addressing oppressive practices based on class and other hierarchies. These attitudes were often manifested in our behaviour as we judged each other harshly according to how we dressed, what our parents did for a living, skin colour, whether we acted the way girls and boys were supposed to act and other designations. We blamed each other being on the ‘wrong’ side of acceptable or desirable circumstance. I have to wonder also, about how the lack of intervention affected the privileged as well as the

marginalized students. If the hurtful actions of students were never acknowledged or taken up in my defense for example, it is not that hard to see how that might affect *me*. However, if this type of reaction is not taken up in the classroom, what message is sent to the aggressors or perpetrators and how then is *their* identity shaped and formed? Which perspectives are reinforced for them if their teachers do not take up concepts of privilege and practices of exclusion?

Gaining Insight through Shared Experiences

During the process of writing my literature review, I shared some of my research about memory work with my students. In an impromptu writing exercise, I asked them to use short sentences describing *feelings* they could remember about things that happened in elementary school. The exercise was timed to five minutes and to help them get started, I wrote down some random thoughts of my own on the board. I sat at my desk to complete my list in the remaining five minutes:

*my tummy hurts my head hurts i don't feel good no one
plays with me no one talks to me i don't get it i can't do
it i feel sick i feel dumb the teacher said i don't try hard
enough my writing is messy my desk is messy my teacher
says I am the messiest student she has ever seen. Stay
after school. Go to the corner for your punishment for
talking and pray until I tell you that you can stop. Your
hair looks like a beaver chewed off the ends Where are
your runners for gym class when are you getting those
new textbooks Your mom hasn't signed the permission
slip for the field trip You need that new text book if you
are going to keep up Where is the money for the trip
There is a really nice second hand clothing store down
the street Don't interrupt Where is your homework Why
didn't you ask to borrow the text from one of the others
in the class i wonder why she never chooses me i wish he
didn't call on me so much repeating the question doesn't
help when i say i don't know the answer i feel i feel
stupid i don't fit in i hate school Don't be such a baby
You have to grow up It's your own fault Don't be silly
it's not important You have to try harder Just be good
behave be quiet Learn the rules Show some respect Your
teacher is trained to do what s/he does*

Most significant to this exercise was the shock the students felt at the deep and powerful emotions that surfaced as they remembered past school experiences. Group discussions followed and each group voiced concerns that as teachers they may, even without meaning to, perpetuate harmful classroom practices because they may emulate their teachers perceptions of normalcy.

Secondary Years: Gendered Times

The population of my high school was made up of mostly middle to upper-middle class families. We were all required to wear uniforms, which saved me and other working-class students from a certain amount of angst by avoiding the obvious pressures regarding fashion and expensive clothing. The first two days of each month were set aside to have our uniforms cleaned. On these two days we could wear our own clothes and of course, it became a chance to show off the wardrobe. The display was always dazzling. In addition, it was the late 1960s which was the mini-skirt era. At the Catholic high school I attended there were rules set forth by the principal regarding the length of our skirts. Girls were required to go through an inspection when they arrived at the school dances to ensure our skirts were not too short. We had to open our coats and the male principal and vice principal looked at our legs to check the length of our skirts. Chaperones patrolled the dance floor to see if we were showing too much leg should our skirts hike up while we were dancing. Either infraction was grounds for girls to be removed from the dance. We were sent home with a stern lecture about morals, decency and modesty.

Girls' uniforms were under constant scrutiny by the principal. I recall having to kneel on the floor in the hall in front of the principal so that he could check to see if my hemline touched the floor. Looking back, of course the implications of social control and sexism are very disturbing. Images of a young girl on her knees in front of an older man who held power over her future, could be viewed as sexual abuse. While I believe that this may not have been their intent, these experiences certainly were at the very least humiliating and they created situations where others could also judge you simply by what you wore. The

principal and all teachers expected total compliance from us, maintaining the image of the “good” and “virginal” young Catholic girl. When the uniforms changed from a one-piece jumper to a skirt and vest, some of us would roll up our skirts at the waistband so our skirts could be short and fashionable. Not being caught required that you be ready at any moment to quickly unroll your skirt at the waistband should a teacher or the principal be seen in the hall. At stake for me was not an argument regarding current fashion but I saw that short skirt as a way to resist following rules I found repressive and judgmental. I did not know words like sexism or patriarchy at the time but I felt like I was being treated unfairly. The boys of the school had no such marker determining their morality. The length of their hair was an issue, but the short hair rule did not place judgment on their identity as good Catholics. This sexist behaviour was not peer related, but rather imposed by the administration of that particular school. If sexism and gender privileging (as in boys escaping scrutiny) was sanctioned by the institution and practiced by our role models, do students not engage in the same type of oppressive practices because they see them as natural and acceptable?

Seeing Race for the First Time?

I always thought that race was not an issue at my school, because, I assumed, everyone was white and in looking back, I was not aware of what it meant to be white. I had been taught not to see that my whiteness afforded me certain privileges (Schick & St. Denis, 2003; Schick, 2000; McIntosh, 1998; Sleeter, 1995; Razack, 1993; LaRocque, 1991). It was not until graduate school that I learned that, as Williams (2001) articulates, “whiteness is a product of history, a racialized identity that has been produced through the racialization and marginalization of others...white people are rarely conscious of their racialized identities for whiteness has remained largely unnamed and invisible” (p. 45). Before attending graduate school, I had never heard the terms like “whiteness, and “white privilege.” In the words of Wellman (1977) I was ensconced in a system that allowed me “not to see what is very salient: the visible markers of social categories that privilege people of European ancestry” (p.186). In

elementary school, I learned about racial discrimination in Social Studies class and by high school, the race riots, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, and the civil rights movements were constantly in the media. However, these things happened in the United States and not in Canada. I do not recall learning anything at all about current issues regarding Native peoples in Canada, immigrant people, women's issues, or any kind of social dynamics surrounding power, privilege and whiteness in my own country (McIntosh, 1998; LaRocque, 1991).

One incident stands out for me. Wyn (pseudonym) and I had been in the same class from grade one to eight but did not socialize until high school. She was often at my home, but I was never invited to hers. There was a time in the eleventh grade when she missed quite a bit of school. I volunteered to take her homework to her house. Her dad greeted me warmly and seemed very happy to meet a school friend of his daughter's. Her mom arrived home while I was visiting with and soon I was being introduced to the whole family. I recall being quite shocked as I could see that they were Native and I wondered why Wyn was with a Native family. It took awhile but quite literally, I actually 'saw' her after that visit and realized for the first time after knowing her for eleven years, that she too was Native.

Many years later, I still wonder how it was that I did not know. I think about what it may have meant to her to not talk about her family and heritage, and what it must have felt like to sit through those social studies classes and learn nothing of her own ancestors except that they were heathen, savage, and lived in tipis. How could Wyn not have felt alienated and excluded? Did she feel like she had to act 'white' in order to fit in? While I did not know that she was Native, I am certain that she knew I was white. It would be many years before I had access to the kind of information that would help sort this all out. To the best of my knowledge, Wyn was never teased or bullied because of her race, but she would have lived everyday within social structures and educational institutions that rendered her invisible as a First Nation's person. Not knowing or 'seeing' Wyn as Native would have at least in part been due to the ways in which we were defined as simply 'students' by teachers at school. As Sleeter (1993) points out,

“white teachers insist that they are “color-blind:” that they see children as children and do not see race”(p. 161). Olsson (1997) argues that individuals who make statements like this assume that non-white people are the same as white people or that they wish to be. She says that claiming to be colour blind means the negation of “cultural values, norms, expectations and life experiences of people of colour” (p. 17). Not ‘seeing’ Wyn as a Native person meant that, as Schick and St. Denis (2003) described in their discussion on why race matters, is that Wyn and other Native students were subjected to having to fit into the socially constructed norms defined by whiteness. They argue that “By denying that race matters, whiteness as in the dominant racial identification can be considered the invisible norm against which others are judged as “not white/not quite” (pp.62-63).

Looking back, I can easily identify negative experiences I now see as exclusionary, marginalizing practices. What is not so easy to process in looking back, is the idea that I was taught *not to see* my own complicity in oppressive practices. I feel it is necessary to explore how these ‘unseen’ spaces protected my peers, my educators, and sometimes me from painful experiences that were imposed on those who were excluded and marginalized due to social hierarchies. Is it possible to adequately articulate the isolation felt by those who do not ‘fit in,’ especially when concepts of privilege are not dismantled or perhaps even talked about to students until post-secondary education? How is it that we were/are left to oppress and exclude without it ever being suggested that what we were doing was deeply rooted in specific social constructs of how and why we define difference as negative and unacceptable? Why is it that students are left to *experience* exclusion, marginalization and or oppressive practices and yet have no frame of reference with which to name it? Kumashiro (2000) argues that, “Oppression refers to a social dynamic in which certain ways of being in this world--including certain ways of identifying or being identified--are normalized or privileged while other ways are disadvantaged or marginalized” (<http://www.antioppressiveeducation.org/director.html>). Kumashiro is referring to interlocking systems of oppressive practices and the pervasive nature of

exclusionary and harmful treatment of individuals based on social positioning that places us at either the centre or the margins of society.

Post-Secondary Education: The Sponge Years

While my mother expected all of her children to become independent and gainfully employed, only her sons were encouraged to attend university. She assumed that her daughters would marry and raise children. I had two children by the time I was twenty-one years old. I did not complete high-school but worked outside the home on a part-time basis and then joined the workforce full-time when my youngest child started school. I knew that the lack of formal education limited my employment prospects, but there were many reasons why I did not entertain the idea of post-secondary education until later in life. While my daughters were finishing their university degrees, I completed a high school equivalency program and enrolled in university as a mature student.

Evident in this reconstruction of my past is a socialization process that labeled me as ‘poor’ or lower class, produced me as a gendered subject, relegated me to lower paying jobs, but at the same time also instilled in me a desire to ‘rise above’ the designations that had been assigned me. I did not yet have the tools of analysis to question why I thought I had to ‘rise above’ anything in order to be thought of as a success. It was as Overall (1995), suggests, “...I [had] naively and unwittingly bought into the oppressive connotations of escape; that partially escaping my working-class origins somehow makes them not important or that anyone can leave if they just work hard enough” (p. 214). At the same time, I did not consider that while I sometimes felt limited because of my social class and gender, that my whiteness was a marker that offered me privilege and protection despite my lower class and gender designations. (Schick, & St. Denis, 2003; McIntosh, 1998; Razack, 1998,). A paradox occurs in that one is at different times oppressed and oppressor without recognizing the significance of either term as a social practice that either harms the self or harms someone else.

Pursuing an undergraduate degree was an overwhelming and life altering experience for me. As a woman, I experienced sexism and gender oppression throughout my life, but I did not know theoretical frameworks that explained how

and why this was so until I learned about patriarchy, power, and male dominance from the books, articles, and discussions in my Women's and Gender Studies classes (Code, 1993; Gilligan & Attanucci, (1988) I knew something about racism in society, but when I enrolled in an introductory Native Studies course, I learned about the connections between the historical and present day circumstances of Aboriginal people in Canada and theories about colonization that helped explain why racism occurs (Culleton, 1984; Miller, 1996; Carter, 1996; Dickason, 1992; Titley, 1986; Campbell, 1973). My Sociology courses examined the social constructs that shaped and formed class and economic positioning in society and the relationship between the individual and groups as they shaped and formed major institutions like the family, education, justice, politics and others (McIntosh, 1998; Parsons, 1991; Freire, 1970). During my undergraduate years, I learned to question previously held assumptions I had about equality and fairness in Canada and around the world. Although I learned about inequality, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppressive practices, I did not learn about the privileges afforded mainstream individuals and groups in society that were based on race, class, gender, for example, until I attended specific graduate courses.

Graduate School and Consciousness Raising

I felt intimidated enrolling in the Master's of Education program. I knew that I had successfully navigated the first degree program, but I had the impression that graduate school was going to require a completely new set of skills. At the Orientation for graduate students, I was informed about the need for highly organized study habits, the several hours of week needed for researching and writing assignments, the intense reading requirements and the level of discussion and participation expected in the classes themselves. I was also working full time to meet the tuition and living expenses and was worried about my ability to cope with the extra demands on my time. While I had an extremely heavy workload throughout my undergrad years, the foray into graduate studies felt different. My biggest concern though, was about meeting the expectations my professors were sure to have. I expected that the freedom of expression and the

potential for endless exchanges of new ideas would ensure that ‘scholarly’ discussion would offer challenging and new ways in which to understand the world around me. While this was the case in some of the classes – it was not the case in all of them. I found that some courses had very limited references to feminist or Indigenous epistemologies and I noticed that a few of the courses did not include current or up to date sources.

It was not until I enrolled in specific graduate classes in the College of Education that I learned about the concept of unearned privileges enjoyed by dominant society (Kumashiro, 2000; McIntosh, 1998; Razack, 1998; Adams, et al., 1997). Through feminist discourse, I learned critical perspectives challenging male based and mainstream social stratification that designated place in society according to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, abilities and other categories. I learned through feminist and anti-racist scholarship that the theory of meritocracy was a myth. Opportunities to get ahead in life did not simply come with pursuing higher learning and/or just working harder. I also learned that there was more to oppression than how it affected the oppressed. There was unearned privilege, a sense of entitlement and benefits that came from belonging to dominant groups in society. Sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression were written about directly by those who experienced them. I was learning about sexism, racism, and the combined oppressions experienced by women of colour explored through articles that were sophisticated and much more complex than anything I had encountered before. The level of analysis was both difficult and exhilarating and I felt that I was privileged to have the opportunity to learn at the graduate level. While this information changed the way I looked at the world and at myself, other things happened during my graduate program that made me doubt myself and question my perceptions about my course work and academia in general.

The “F” Word

Of course, I knew that I would not have the same level of interest in all of the courses I took in my graduate program. What I did expect though, was the same degree of critical thinking and freedom of expression in all my classes. While my undergraduate major was in Native Studies, I was firmly rooted in feminist studies and I had a keen interest in social justice issues like racism and sexism and other forms of oppression learned through feminist epistemologies. I knew that these perspectives would be reflected in my presentations and class discussions. However, I was not prepared for the negative reception I received from several class members. Some of my peers felt it was acceptable to groan, roll their eyes, provide comments like “oh no, not the “f” word (feminism) again.” They made derogatory comments when I offered opinions and analysis of articles and assignments. I was often mocked about going to the classes that focused on women’s issues. Some of the students labeled my feminist classes “Women and Work Boots” or “Men are Scum: 101.” Of course, not all my peers commented this way, but there was no mistaking that it was open season on feminism in certain classes during my graduate work.

One of my male colleagues told me that it was not fair to subject the class to feminist diatribes when they had no choice but to sit and listen. He did not accept my challenge that mainstream or non-feminist worldviews could be considered an imposition as well. He replied that these views were ‘normal’ and had nothing to do with gender perspectives. It is commonplace for students to disagree with each other, thus ensuring the most interesting and lively class discussions. However, the degree to which I was summarily ridiculed or dismissed for my beliefs and feminist views was disturbing. I do not recall professors coming to my defense. In fairness, I did not feel that my professors agreed with the students who were so negative and vocal about feminist perspectives. However, neither they intervene on my behalf. When I broached concerns about this with my instructors, I was advised to seek support from the “other feminist” on staff.

I learned eventually to avoid class discussions that might lead to uncomfortable spaces for me. I decided to save my views for my written assignments where issues of race, class, sexism, and other forms of oppressive practices could be infused into all the subject material we explored as graduate students. Looking back though, I wonder about the implications for adult learners in education programs, when a student is made to feel uncomfortable in the learning environment and there are no apparent means to deal with this discomfort. I also wonder how I, (usually strong in my beliefs and reasonably confident) was silenced or became passive when peers made derisive comments about my feminist views. I had some questions at the time and in retrospect, I still wonder:

- The incidents I described above usually took place during class time. Why did my professor(s) not step in and at least speak up about freedom of expression and/or academic freedom?
- What kinds of educative conditions make insults and negative remarks about feminist worldviews even sayable?
- Are there times when even adult learners are vulnerable and in need of visible support from their instructors?
- If instructors are silent or non-committal during these occurrences, are they not agreeing with or perpetuating oppressive practice?
- All of my peers were instructors at the time, or were going to be involved in adult education and training. What are the implications for *their* students when lack of respect for difference or worldviews other than their own goes unchecked in their teacher education?
- How and when does adult education practice inclusive and anti-oppressive pedagogy within its own borders?
- How do we initiate the dialogue needed to address each other as participants in oppressive practices as educators on post-secondary institutions?

The “F” word To the Rescue!

While I was disappointed in some aspects of my graduate program, most of my course work was interesting, informative, stimulating, and challenging. Each of my professors were dedicated to the concept of lifelong learning and higher education for adults. I was however very much affected by the personal interactions with my peers and professors that occurred in the spaces between the lectures and the assignments. The replication of the schoolyard social arena surprised me. As a graduate student, I experienced and/or witnessed episodes of peer pressure, teasing, bullying and other disturbing ways in which we related to each other. There was no academic discourse made available to me to help make visible the problematic ways in how we, as adults, addressed each other based on respect for difference or a lack thereof.

Feminist educator Ellsworth (1997) provides insight into the varying ways that students and teachers address each other in the learning environment. She draws from Reading's (1996) discussions on pedagogy as a scene of particular address. Ellsworth says that “he insists on thinking of pedagogy, as “a lived time and space in which teaching positions students and teachers both physically and discursively, and creates terms for social relationship through modes of address” (as cited in Ellsworth, 1997, p.162). Perhaps the same problematic relationships that defined us as children and youth in school are closer to the surface than we would imagine. I discovered that not wanting to stand out or go against the grain, much to my chagrin, was still part of my adult identity. I was confident in my beliefs but I did not want to be thought of by my peers as opinionated or annoying. I think it would be worthwhile exploring and discussing how to address the nature of our student-to-student and student/professor relationships in all of our undergraduate and graduate adult education programs. Ellsworth (1997) argues that as adults we need to respect each other. She feels that respect is not about being obligated to:

understand each other, know the other, or find our common ground”....rather we learn to “listen without knowing why, without understanding...I speak and I listen not because I recognize myself or aspects of self reflected in the other (whom I therefore find respectable)-but

because I owe respect to an absolutely different other – an unrecognizable other, an other irreducibly different than myself (p. 162).

Through Ellsworth's powerful reasoning, I felt as if I had just stumbled upon an important clue in understanding the puzzling student to student and student to teacher relationships. If I could learn to - and teach my students to - toss away the notion that agreement and common ground are necessary for successful teaching and learning, we may be able to look at issues like resistance to anti-oppressive education differently. Perhaps then the "unrecognizable other" that Ellsworth refers to would be welcome and made comfortable within our raced, gendered and classed environments.

Through my own memory work, I have shaken out some disturbing memories about my experiences as a graduate student. However, through the discourse provided by Tompkins (1996) Ellsworth (1997), Britzman (2003), and other feminist scholars examined in my literature review, I can see ways and means of dealing with situations that will undoubtedly surface with my own students. What is most significant to me about this whole experience is how the patterns involved in teaching and learning established in elementary and secondary schooling were repeated in a graduate program. There we were, together as adults - graduate students - of different ages, genders, professions, and different life experiences. Although we enrolled in a graduate program for varying reasons, we exhibited some disturbing characteristics. In retrospect, I can see the school yard replicating itself where even as adult learners and educators, we were still bullies, we were aggressive, resistant, passive and we also isolated, silenced, and ignored each other as we engaged in graduate work on the education of adults in today's society. I felt that this experience would be useful one to share with teacher candidates because it is a good example of what happens in every level of society when we lack the gender, privilege, class, race analyses provided by anti-oppressive education.

Summary

It was rather disconcerting to find myself experiencing oppressive practices in the graduate program. While I could identify the circumstances that led me to feel isolated and undervalued, and marginalized in this program, I also had to ask myself if I ignored the fact that other students also experienced oppressive practices. The answer is ‘yes.’ There were times when I stayed silent when some of my peers voiced concern over curriculum that did not reflect their heritage and ethnicity. There were gender imbalances that remained unchallenged in the course reading packages and textbooks. Quite likely, I am unaware (still in denial perhaps) of the times when I was dismissive of my peers’ perspectives. I certainly do not recall anyone – peer or professor- addressing those issues. What *is* clear, however, is the need for the kind of pedagogical practice that Tompkins (1996) recommends. Re/membering our past (no matter how recent) may, help our quest to discover what kind of people we become because of our school experiences. Tracing the roots of our social relationships in the school environment may provide some insight in disassociating ourselves from the perpetuation of social injustices at every level of schooling. As the examination of my own memory work concludes, I feel ready to seek information about past school experiences from the three women who agreed to participate in my study.

Part Three explores the memories and analyses of the meanings attached to those memories as Sandra, Louise, and Susan, (pseudonyms) and I engage in re/membering our past school experiences. The idea to interview practicing teachers came from the teacher candidates in the course I was teaching on anti-oppressive education. My students felt that they would benefit by hearing from practicing teachers who used the memories from their own past schooling to help them identify and address oppressive practices in schools today.

PART THREE

Part Three outlines my research methodology and is an exploration of the memory work shared by practicing teachers. The three participants are currently teaching in Saskatchewan schools and are self-defined activists for social justice in the school environment. They have also given me permission to share their stories when I engage my students in memory work to help them make personal connections to the theories surrounding anti-oppressive pedagogy.

CHAPTER FOUR: The Research

The research question framing this study is: How might educators use retrospective analysis regarding their past childhood school experiences to help identify incidents of oppression defined through current anti-oppressive education theories? How are teachers, teacher candidates affected when as children and youth in the schools, oppressive practices like racism, sexism, homophobia, class-based hierarchies and other oppressive practices took place but were not named as such? Understanding that as educators, we have been influenced by the past where oppression went unchallenged, is an important step in connecting to the theories that help us address oppression in the school environment.

Increasing Understanding: Narrative Inquiry

My research uses narrative inquiry to investigate my own memories and the memories of three other female teachers about the relationships we had with our peers and our teachers in elementary and secondary schools. By sharing stories about our schooling, we uncover uncontested classroom practices and relationships that took place between students and between students and teachers in elementary and secondary school environments. At the same time, researchers like Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narratives may help us understand our own experiences through the knowledge shared by other teachers. By sharing our stories we are able to identify and unpack moments of tension that occur between students and between students and teachers fostered by the often-inhospitable spaces in formal schooling. My intent is to understand, describe, and elicit better teaching practice when it comes to the practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, “a three dimensional narrative inquiry space” providing text that, “looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experience within place” (pp. 139-140) to help us make sense of the world at any particular time and place.

According to Gallavan and Whitemore (2003) narrative research:

enables us to view, question, and analyze our individual life journeys over time, as well as the life journeys of others occurring simultaneously around us. Exchanging our journeys with others forces us to select the important encounters and events, to prioritize our values and beliefs, and to articulate these stories clearly and honestly (p. 24).

Gallavan and Whitemore’s suggestion of simultaneous occurrences fascinated me, because I found congruity in the stories my education students shared and my own memories of schooling. I wondered what my participants stories would reveal about the past, especially as our narratives would reflect experiences spread across three different decades.

Hones (1998) suggests that narratives have the power to transform both the tellers and the researcher. He provided a rationale for stories as a medium for change and taking action. Hones says, “we can recover our memories, renegotiate our present, and reconsider the possibilities of change within our communities, our nation, and our world” (p. 244). The idea that narrative research can encourage transformation resonates with me, as an educator in a teacher education program. The notion of schools as communities’ rich with resources and people who are working to create social change makes that transformation possible. Norquay (1993) argues, “Transformation is possible through the interrogation of our memories. The intent is to use reconstruction of the past as a resource for better understandings of the present, and thereby creating new possibilities for the future” (p. 245).

My experiences as an anti-oppressive educator indicated that students tend to view oppressive practices as something they had read about or heard about through various forms of media but had never witnessed. I felt that if I could help them make personal connections to either experiencing witnessing, or participating

in exclusionary practice within school experiences, they would be better able to make the links to the damaging and injurious oppressive practices regarding race, class, gender, sexual orientation and the other forms of oppression addressed through anti-oppressive pedagogy. It occurred to me that narrative research about classroom life coming from teachers would encourage future educators to take a critical look at their own schooling where teachers and other role models and peers had either knowingly or unknowingly participated in excluding or marginalizing others. Our school memories provide many examples of how ‘difference’ was viewed and experienced as a negative or as an undesirable condition. Qualitative research in the form of narratives will help to answer the overarching question; How can we use our past experiences to facilitate positive engagement with anti-oppressive education theories?

Criteria and the Selection of the Participants

First, I wanted to interview educators currently working within Saskatchewan schools as a response to a request arising in my teaching practice. Secondly, my participants would have to be engaged in or be familiar with the tenets of anti-oppressive pedagogy. I chose three women from a possible dozen or so candidates who were previously known to me through activism for social justice in the community. Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (1998) state that often the researcher often “knows the subjects through interacting with them” (p. 94). Third, the authors advise that subjects should be at ease and able to talk freely, producing rich data that reveals personal perspectives. They suggest that subjects participating in qualitative research should be at ease and comfortable with each other because disclosure of personal information and feelings requires a level of trust. Pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of Sandra, Louise, and Susan who agreed to participate in my study. These women have children in elementary, middle, high school and post-secondary institutions and have combined teaching experience of more than forty-five years. Each is known by their peers for community activism, professional development on issues of social justice, and

for the tangible resources they have contributed to the environment where they each work.

One of the participants presently teaches in a Community School and has been teaching for more than twenty-five years.⁴ The second works with inner-city youth and teaches in a teacher education program. The third individual had also taught for many years and teaches in both mainstream and Community schools.

I was also a participant in this study. Darroch and Silvers (1982) argue that the researcher's presence in the act of inquiry and their articulation of those presences are basic conditions for knowledge in the human sciences and education. They state that the researcher's biography must be available to others because it shows a visible commitment to the discourse under study. The authors suggest that the researcher's presence in the act of inquiry and articulation of that presence provides authentic voice related to the phenomenon under study.

I chose teachers to take part in this narrative research because I felt that sharing specific memories through our stories about our own school days might provide valuable information on creating safe, inclusive, and caring environments for our current students. Hobson (2001) suggests that "making sense of the world through narrative offers insight and allows us to examine "our own experiences with inequity, power, and authority in schools and offers us the opportunity to inform ourselves further and to move forward to change situations in which today's students experience injustice" (p. 14).

⁴ According to Salm, (2004) Community Schools began in 1980 in Saskatchewan. They were initiated to address "the needs of the most impoverished Aboriginal children who suffer from triple jeopardy (i.e. poverty, cultural tension, and community alienation)...A formal government structure, the designation of community schools, emerged in response to grassroots efforts as educators assumed roles that typically had been the responsibilities of families and communities" (4). According to School Plus, A Vision for Children and Youth, "the term 'Community School' designates a school that receives funding support according to a formula specified by the Department of Education's Community School program. [and] is more or less equivalent to a particular funding schedule...schools could get more or less money than the Saskatchewan Education formula, or no extra money at all, and still be *community schools* in a perfectly valid sense of that term" (47).

Gathering Data

The combination of guided conversations, and group gatherings were conducted in non-formal manner in my home. I felt that meeting in my home rather than an office or any other public setting would help ensure that the participants were comfortable and that confidentiality would not be breeched. I met with each of the participants separately for the semi-structured interviews and the guided conversations. To begin each meeting, I made cappuccino as we talked about our workday, our children and our students. I found that the ritual involved in making cappuccinos took the attention away from the note pad and tape recorder set up on the kitchen table. The task also gave me time to think about what was ahead. The pottery mugs, frothy topping and sprinkles of chocolate always draw favourable comments from my guests. It is a special treat and served as an icebreaker at the same time.

Each woman was given the interview guidelines and discussion questions ahead of time and they were aware that we would be discussing memories and feelings about past school experiences (See Appendix A). As well, I informed them that we would be discussing their own perceptions of anti-oppressive pedagogy and the ideas involved in teaching towards social justice in the schools. After reading all of the questions and reflecting about the past, each indicated that they were recalling experiences that they had not thought about in years. Because I am adding my own personal experiences to this study, the authenticity that drives interpretive inquiry is present throughout this research (van Manen, 1990).

We met in my home, as I felt that the setting would be relaxed and confidentiality would be ensured. I met with each woman individually and then we came together as a focus group – or as I prefer to describe it - a gathering - to share our memories, thoughts, and ideas about our childhood school experiences.

There were also two group meetings for one and a half hours each. The participants had time to reflect and react to each other's comments. All the sessions were audio taped and transcribed within a few days of our meetings. I jotted down very few notes during the interview process. I felt that note taking would inhibit the flow of conversation and would cause the participants to

become self-conscious. I listened to the tapes after each session for tone of voice, hesitations, pauses, and noted the places when conversations flowed or seemed stilted.

Design of the Study

I used semi-structured interviews, guided conversations, and discussion group sessions to collect stories from teachers looking back on their experiences as students in the school systems. Grumet (1987) suggests ‘multiple telling’ as an inclusive method of collecting data. She says that we should “splinter the dogmatism of a single tale and free the teller from being captured by the reflection in a single narrative” (as cited in Hobson, 2001, p. 15). The multiple telling in this study includes semi-structured interviews where I asked each participant how long she had been teaching and to describe student/faculty of the school where she currently teaches. I also asked each to identify according to ethnicity/race. Guided conversations followed these questions and provided a more in-depth understanding of my participants personal philosophies on teaching and initiated a retrospective look at past school student teacher relationships and memories of personal experiences. Shank (2002), suggests that conversations are important and different from interviews because they are guided by participants themselves, rather than just the interviewer. Especially important to our discussion were the questions that pertained to times when they were excluded or treated unfairly by their peers or teachers. As well, I asked them to recall incidents when they or their teachers excluded others or treated others unfairly. If they had not experienced being treated unfairly, I asked them to describe what it was that made them feel comfortable in the school environment. I let them know that we would revisit these topics in the group gathering scheduled for later that same week. Each individual interview was conducted within the same week and the group gatherings were scheduled within three days of the last individual interview.

Another way to encourage multiple tellings as suggested by Grumet (1987) is through a focus group. I prefer to call our group meeting a gathering, which has a less formal and less structured feel to it. The group gathering

brought the participants and I together for the first time in the study. I had the advantage of familiarity with the topic material from our individual meetings and from studying the transcripts and listening to the tapes before the gathering. Shank (2002) suggests that “sharing of experiences can help guide the participants to greater awareness”.... where participants may be “more likely to discuss complex and intimate issues when participating in a group discussion” (p. 45). Once we began to chat, stories emerged that seemed to take on a life of their own.

Semi-structured questions, guided conversations and group discussions were important tools to use in drawing out in-depth information. Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (1998) state that interview types can vary throughout the same study because the collection of information and data is cumulative. Layers of rich information were added to my study as participants became more comfortable with each other and with me as participant/researcher. Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (1998) argue that varying and combining ways to gather information encourages elaboration and sharing that simple question and answer interview sessions do not. They state that in-depth communication “involves building a relationship, getting to know each other, and putting the subject at ease” (pp. 93-96). This technique reflects the philosophy of qualitative research and feminist practice (Clandinin & Huber, 2002; Bogdan & Knopp Biklen, 1998; Ellsworth, 1997; Darroch & Silvers, 1982).

Reflections of Lived Experiences

To reflect on the lived experiences of my participants I will draw on the philosophies defined through phenomenological reasoning. This differs from the more in-depth use of phenomenology as a research method in that I am using it only as a process and a product to gather and understand the stories collected through a series of narratives that emerged through interviews, conversations and group gatherings. According to van Manen (1990), phenomenology increases our perceptiveness and offers an intensified awareness of phenomena that seems trivial but can also be quite profound. Darroch and Silvers (1982) suggest that

phenomenological reflection upon our lived experiences are perspectives about things that happen which that may have seemed ordinary at the time, but when looked at again through narratives, no longer seem ordinary. Our perceptions shift when the seemingly ordinary experiences or occurrences in our lives become extra/ordinary through retrospection. Throughout our conversations, my participants and I repeated the phrases, “I never thought this was important, ” and “how could that have actually gone on and no one said anything or did anything about it?” These very telling phrases taken within the context of phenomenology require us to explore critically the interpretive reflective spaces that retrospection offers. Shifts in perceptions occur through a critical re/view of what happened to us at school (or other experiences in our lives) and the meaning we ascribe to these experiences later in life. Atkinson (1995) suggests, retrospection can:

can pull the blinders off our eyes. It can teach us something Important about life that we had probably forgotten we knew. The act of imposing a narrative framework on the raw material of our lives brings new order and clarity to something somehow familiar to us. A good story allows us to wrestle with our demons, and, ultimately connect with our soul. Telling ourselves and others these deep stories of our lives is doing soul work. It is through stories that symbolic imaged and universal, timeless themes find expression. Through this kind of deliberate, soulful expression, we come to terms with our own experience, our own life, in relation to others (p. 5).

According to van Manen (1990), narratives about the past can evoke events buried in our subconscious until they surface through particular associations. He suggests that researchers use reflection and retrospection to help re/order our lived experiences so that memories surface to create new meanings. I think it is essential to examine the things that happened to us in school that may have seemed trivial at the time but indeed have profound implications when viewed through anti-oppressive education theories. van Manen says that researchers can use phenomenology as a tool, “to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence-in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a

notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience” (p. 36).

CHAPTER FIVE: Gathering Memories

I met with each of my participants individually and we met together twice as a group. I offered my home as our meeting place because I wanted to create an informal setting that would be relaxing and comfortable for each of them. As each participant was teaching full time, we met after work. As we shared food and cappuccino, the tensions from the workday eased and they were able to make the transition from teaching to remembering what it was like when they were school children. For the purpose of continuity, I began each individual meeting with the same story about an experience I had with a teacher when I was in the second grade. What follows are the shared memories about things that happened to each us at school that if discussed at all by our teachers or other adults in our lives, were seen as behaviour or attitudes of certain individuals, but not officially connected to our education in any meaningful way. This chapter is about our storied lives as students.

Sandra

Sandra is soft-spoken, kind, thoughtful, and articulate. She has been teaching for almost 30 years and has the most teaching experience of all of us. Although she has taught in both mainstream and inner city schools, she prefers the smaller student population and the sense of community evident in the inner-city school. Sandra identifies as being white and from a German background. She attended the same school from grades one through twelve in a small rural German Catholic community in Saskatchewan.

We met after school on a weekday. Sandra arrived right on time and we shared stories about our workweek over cappuccino and muffins. The presence of the tape

recorder in the middle of the kitchen table and note-pad and pens by my coffee cup were a reminder that this was not exactly a social visit. Sandra said that she had been preparing to share memories of her school experiences, but in doing so, she couldn't help but wonder about the kinds of memories she was helping to create for her own students. We chatted about whether or not things had changed much over the years regarding children's' relationships with each other or with their teachers in the school environment.

Sandra said that although she was unaware of any racial tensions, gender issues, or sexism while she was growing up in her community, she was very much aware of divisions according to income and class. She said that families were judged according to their economic status, which made things difficult for her family as they were struggling to maintain a small farm and experiencing a lot of hardship.

*The Church was very prominent in the rural area where I grew up. The nuns had a home in the community and everyone knew them. It seemed that each year the amount of the tithe or offering to the church determined who their favourite families were. Donations to the church were **published** monthly in the Church Bulletin— exactly how much money each family put in the collection baskets each Sunday. The families who gave the most money were often invited to the nuns' house for dinner as the year went on. So I think that would probably have been something that would kind of stuck in your mind about, okay you don't fit up there. You might fit here...⁵*

Sandra mimed ladder motion with her hands as she spoke showing a top and bottom rung and indicated that her family was at the bottom of the ladder.

Even though we went to a protestant school, we still had religion lessons at the school. Being Catholic was all tied in to who you were in my community. The kids who were invited to the nuns' house bragged a lot afterwards and they chided me because I had never been there. My family was never invited for dinner or any other reason, but this was never discussed at home. I noticed though that my parents were more comfortable around certain people in the community than they were others. The social outings the family enjoyed were more likely to include aunts, uncles, and cousins that lived near by rather than the local towns folk.

⁵ Italics are used to highlight the participants verbatim stories and comments interspersed throughout the next two chapters.

Sandra's story reminded me of something I had not thought of in many years. As the youngest in my family, it was my job to put the tithe in the collection basket passed around during the Offering at Sunday Mass. I remember thinking that I was so lucky because our envelope made so much noise and none of the other envelopes jingled at all. It was not until I learned to read, though, that I noticed that the spaces for name, address, and amount of the donation were always blank where it seemed like there was writing on everyone else's. One Sunday, I asked my mother why ours was blank. She said that she did not think that God really minded 'who' gave 'what' to the church. I did not really understand what she meant, but I knew that something was different about our donation. I remember one Sunday in particular. One of the girls in my grade one class sat next to me in Mass. She laughed when she heard the change jingle in the envelope I placed in the collection plate and told me that *everyone* gave "dollars" and not coins to the Church. The next day in school, she told everyone in the class that my family only gave pennies to the church and the other kids made cruel remarks and taunted me for being too stingy to help Jesus. After that happened, I told my mother that I did not want to put the envelope in the basket anymore. It would be years before I understood that our envelope was filled with coins because that was all my mother could spare. I remember the tears in my mother's eyes when she said that she would put the envelope in the collection basket herself from then on.

Like Sandra, I too was aware at a very young age of being different or not "fitting in." Because Sandra lived in a small community there was little separation between things that happened involving the local Catholic Church and things that happened to the Catholic children attending school, like reading the names of those families who contributed their monthly tithe. While I lived in a bigger centre, nuns and priests taught at the Catholic school I attended. We attended Mass once a week at our school. Quite often, the nuns would comment on which students attended mass either each Sunday at church or on Fridays at the school. One nun in particular kept track of the students who went to confession before attending mass. At school, she also read out names of the children who received Holy Communion and they were given gold stars on a chart on the wall of her

classroom. There did not seem to be any separation between church and school as far as being a good Catholic was concerned. The students who did not get the gold stars were teased and threatened with going to Hell by other students.

Our conversation shifted from the church to school and Sandra began to share her memories about herself and some of the other students. Sandra mentioned that there was not much diversity in her community or at school.

When I was growing up, we tended to socialize with cousins and other family members but not with a lot of other people in the community. So when I went to school, I just remember feeling all alone and isolated... very alone, and not really knowing how, I guess, to interact or play with kids. We did have two boys in the school, who were foster children, and one was Aboriginal and one was not. That was my only contact also with anybody who was not white, until I came to university.

Sandra began to talk about the connection between how she thought of herself and how others viewed her in elementary school.

It took me three years, of my schooling to feel that I was competent. I began to get the grade that was equivalent to another person who I thought was bright. I learned that I was probably not as dumb as I had thought I was.... and that is all I can say about that. People were kind of put into categories by how 'smart' they were and where they stood in the class. Being smart was good in the eyes of your teachers of course, but often not in the eyes of the other kids.

What did help.... if you were a keener was if you were good at sports. And I was good at sports, so I can remember distinctly when we'd go out to play ball.... The captain would pick a boy, and then pick a girl. And I can tell you after all these years; I still remember the names of the girls that were always left until last. I just remember feeling, whoo, glad I'm not last. Usually I was the first picked. If not the first, the second, and I think that that . . . I was very aware that it gave you status to be good at sports. And then you could still be a keener, but not be too obvious about your grades.

It was interesting for me to hear Sandra's perspectives on this, as I was one of those girls who were always chosen last for the sports teams. I can still recall the names of the ones who were always chosen first. As we shared our stories, Sandra said that often 'fitting in' was determined by those that did not.

In about grade two or three there was a young boy in my class who wasn't very smart. His parents were older, could have been grandparents, and they were what we would have considered the low, low class. One time, he got his tongue stuck to the railing outside the school. It was a one-room school, on a cold day. And I just remember the feeling and the kids saying, "Well gee, it was TJ ...what do you expect?"

Looking back, I remember that I did not even want to feel too much empathy or sympathy for him or anything. I was glad it was him and not somebody else, and not me. And I know that there were a few others that were kind of relegated to that kind of scummy position, and you surely didn't want to be there, so you'd do whatever you needed to do to try to not be in there. And if that meant making fun of him when he was in pain, that's probably what we did.

You just knew by the clothes that he wore and different things that he was different. I don't think it's necessarily the way humans are, but there was some message that I had figured out at a very young age... TJ wasn't worth as much as some of the other kids, so don't waste your time getting to know him.

I told Sandra, that I could certainly remember the day I learned that my family was poor. It was the beginning of Lent and Sister V announced that the school was having a rummage sale to raise funds for the Holy Childhood. Then she asked the class for volunteers said, "Elizabeth if you want to volunteer sorting items for the sale, you could pick out some clothes for helping out." To this day, I am not sure what her intent was, but I sometimes still hear the laughter of the class as the implications sunk in. Sandra shared some thoughts about the role teachers and the schools played unknowingly or knowingly as transmitters of social norms.

There was a boy, who was a very smart boy, but socially he wasn't popular. He didn't dress very well and he lived on a farm too... he kind of smelled like the barn, so it was like, oooh nobody wants to dance with M.... everyone was mean to him. Even though he had excellent grades, he was a loner and sometimes he misbehaved. I don't recall a teacher ever praising him or stepping in when he was treated badly by the class.

I guess I'm wondering if teachers were more likely to step in when things happen if it was a good student that was being excluded or marginalized or harassed or bullied by other kids. If it was one of their favorites, or someone who is well behaved they would. They'd be more likely to turn a blind eye when, in that teacher's mind, that child is already marginalized and not part of the mainstream. It is kind of like that, the teacher goes along with that kind of thinking and allows this to happen.

Confusion over what it took to actually be valued as an individual in the school system was something that concerned Sandra.

I remember in grade one... learning to read. we were lined up on the bench and we'd read aloud until we made a mistake, and then we were sent to the end of the line, which made you feel like a failure. So rather than receiving positive feedback for doing well, you feared and dreaded making mistakes and we learned to strive for some kind of standard that was not possible for anyone to meet.

This memory helped Sandra understand where her sense of not being “smart enough” originated.

I remember never being sure that I was doing enough academically. I recall that in high school, I got 100% in Geo-Trig in each term, but it felt like it wasn't enough because I still didn't have a sense of belonging or of being valued for who I was. A hundred wasn't even enough to say, “you're smart, you should feel good about school” I would say to myself “an A will do it.” But No...it didn't.

Sandra had learned that negotiating acceptance from peers and teachers was not straightforward or easy. She learned at an early age not to reveal too much about her family's heritage, even though she lived in a predominately German community.

When I was growing up, I was watching TV a lot, and there were always these movies on about the war and Nazis. They either portrayed Germans as evil or really stupid, with no real personalities. In those shows it appeared that all German people were soldiers. My Mom is German, and I can remember thinking, thank goodness, I don't speak her language or have any kind of German accent.

Sandra said that she could not recall any discussion throughout her elementary or high school education about the cultures or ethnicities of her peers or teachers. She said they were not asked to share information on each other's cultures, traditions, or the importance of understanding each other's ethnic histories and heritage. Sandra remembered being teased about her German heritage and she said that jokes that made fun of Ukrainian people, the French, and others were commonplace. Even though these remarks and jokes were often told in the presence of teachers, she could not recall a teacher ever stepping in to talk to students about the harm done by this kind of talk or behaviour. I asked her to

comment on the roles and responsibilities of teachers and the school system, in light of the experiences our memories were uncovering.

Looking back, I can see that I was not protected or served by the school system... every year of my life probably.

Louise

I first met Louise at an in-service professional development program on anti-racist education. She generously shared her perspectives and concerns about creating safe and inclusive school environments. Louise is straightforward, capable, and compassionate. My first and lasting impression of her was that she would speak her mind first, and then seek support from others, and then she would follow through with what ever it takes to do something about the situation. She is someone you would go to when you needed something done.

Louise describes herself as white, mainstream, and middle class. Her ethnic heritage is a combination of French, British, Norwegian, and Scottish. She mentioned recent research into her genealogy indicates a Métis great grandmother on her mother's side.

We lived in the city in a middle-class neighbourhood . . . I lived such a secluded, white, middle-class life. In the elementary school I attended, all of the teachers were white. As far as teachers belonging to any kind of specific ethnic group, I don't recall any teachers mentioning their heritage. But they were white. The student population was almost totally white too. One family, I realize now, was probably Métis, or perhaps First Nations, I don't know. Then in high school, again I would say probably predominantly white teaching staff, and as far as students, predominantly white again. I couldn't say because it was never discussed because they were too busy thinking about being Catholic. Anything that was ever discussed on a more personal note was more about going to mass or religious celebrations, and that was it.

I remember that sense of superiority about our Catholics school compared to ' that other school' across the park. Definitely.

I shared a similar impression with Louise. We were the only Catholic family on our block. I can remember coming home and getting all my little Protestant friends together and telling them that they were going to go to hell. I couldn't wait to tell them that. I was so happy to say, you're going to hell and I'm not.

Louise talked about her first impressions about school.

I remember that I certainly didn't have a personal relationship at all with any of my teachers. It was very much the teacher, the students, and never the two shall meet. My father was a teacher and eventually a principal in the Catholic system and we come from a long line of teachers. We were always told that if ever anything happened at school, if ever we got into trouble, we would get it twice at home.

I could relate to Louise's statement. If I ever come home upset about something a teacher had said to me or had done that hurt my feelings, I learned that it was probably my own fault. In my family, teachers were placed on a pedestal, so I also learned to keep any incidents that I felt bad about to myself. As the oldest child in the family, Louise recalls that her parents set very high standards for her.

I marched a pretty straight and narrow path myself and even as a young child, I prayed that someday I would have children who would march to their own drum beat, and they did. But as for me, I had heard enough negative and positive stories about students from my dad that I knew exactly how to impress my teachers. I learned too from my dad's stories, how to be the kid that other kids liked.

She still remembers the students who, for one reason or another, were not liked or did not make a very good impression on the students or the teachers.

I remember once in elementary school, there were probably more times, but once in particular, this poor girl, goodness knows. I think she just had some bad habits. Poor thing, she picked her nose, and she was older than we were, she was the new kid, and it became this awful kind of gang mentality. That it was okay to ignore her, or okay to treat her badly, to be unfriendly.

One time, her mother came to our house because we lived on the same crescent, and I felt terrible because how we had treated her was.... it was kind of... in your face kind of teasing etc... At that time, you're eleven or twelve, and in looking back on it you think, how could I have possibly treated someone like that. But you're part of that crowd.

I don't really have memories of being treated unfairly in elementary school, but I do have memories, though of that happening to others who were struggling, who were not those round pegs that fit all the round holes.

Some children obviously came from a poorer background, were not as well dressed or whatever, certainly didn't receive the same kind of attention that the rest of the students did. And if they did receive attention, it was negative. Negative attention. So, that was my perception as a child. I knew that as early as grade four.

Something did not seem right to me.... even at that age, I knew if a child was well dressed and had nice playthings, material things; they were in a higher class.

I started having the feeling that it was a darned good thing that I was from a middle-class family. That I enjoyed, not necessarily in the terms of enjoying privilege, like I certainly wouldn't have used that language, but that it was a good thing that they knew I was from a teacher's family.

Louise recalled difficult times in high school.

I remember one time in grade nine, going down the hallway by myself. I was very, very shy. You had to go through where the old school and the new school connected, there were boot racks, and there were boys sitting on these boot racks and when I walked through, they started barking. And I just felt so low. I didn't tell anybody because I knew nothing would be done....So again, academically, teacher population-wise I was fine, but socially.... my self-esteem around my peers...that was not ok... no

I also remember sarcasm and cutting remarks by teachers to some other students...and you had a feeling that it was not right. You didn't have any power, or you felt you didn't have any power to say anything about it. And I didn't even tell my parents about it.

Louise recalled other times when she knew some of the things teachers were doing were not right.

I was aware as a child, I was aware. What do you do about it? I always had this vague feeling that things were not right. I had a grade nine English class where we had to do this stupid round-robin reading, if you can imagine doing that in grade nine. There was a boy who stuttered. Do you think that teacher could have any empathy at all? She made that boy . . . I can't even talk about it now without getting upset.... I think that's the closest I came to standing up and saying to this teacher, "you are an idiot."

Louise concluded our conversation by saying that when we started this memory work; she felt that she didn't really have to think twice about having many negative experiences as a young child in school. She felt that while she was treated well, she knew that everything went reasonably well for her. However, in retrospect she is having to re/think her position.

Earlier I said that I wasn't treated badly by any of my teachers, but now that I think about it, that is not true.

I grew up thinking that I had to be perfect everyday. I usually wouldn't give an answer unless I knew it was correct. I never ever had the feeling that anyone was interested in my opinion. Never. I guess that is something to think about...isn't it?

Susan

I met Susan at a talk she was giving about literacy in Canada. She asked her audience to consider that literacy or non-literacy was related to social issues like poverty, language barriers, lack of instructional material that reflected diverse cultures and heritage rather than being about ability to read and write in the English language. She also pointed out that literacy could be connected to past school experiences and self-esteem or the lack of self-esteem created in children and youth based on positive and negative school experiences. I was impressed with her professional manner and because she established a connection with each of us by shaking our hands before she began her lecture. She has a firm handshake and a direct unwavering gaze. Susan is soft spoken, pragmatic and introspective. She is the youngest of the participants and has been teaching for about seventeen years.

Susan describes herself as “very white and middle class” from a European background. Her father is Irish and her mother German. Her parents immigrated to Canada from England when she was just a baby.

I would say we are a middle class family, but that is what our life was after several years in Canada. However, my parents came from a very poor post-war, extreme poverty in Ireland and Germany. They didn't have enough to eat, and had no relatives to help them when they were starting out. My father became a teacher and my mother went into nursing.

Susan recalls her early school experiences as being rather predictable and uninteresting. She recalls that there was some ethnic and racial diversity in her elementary school.

There were Oriental children in my class, in my school, but we were predominantly white. I remember in my middle years there was one Chinese family, who owned the Chinese restaurant in town, and the one Japanese family. I still am friends with the Japanese girl. There was one Black family. We knew that they had different skin color and that they were different from the rest of us somehow. It was never really talked about.

There was an Italian family on my street. There was a white Jamaican woman who babysat us. It was multicultural in the sense that most of the people on the street were immigrants, or very elderly Canadian people. But that was it.

Susan talked about feeling like the odd one out when she went to German language lessons.

I always struggled with the German. It's a very complex language and very different from English and these other kids had grown up with two parents speaking and they did very well. That was a very formative experience for me because I was the one out of step. The one that couldn't figure anything out, the one who couldn't do well. And for others it was just like breathing. They could do it no problem.

This was a very different experience for Susan because she was used to doing well in school and she said that she learned some valuable lessons.

I think that experience with being on the outside in the German school . . . it was really a very safe kind of thing. It was an extra-curricular for one thing. It wasn't a day-in, day-out experience of exclusion. That would be very difficult and unbearable, but it was enough that I got somewhat of a taste what that feels like. And I think that it made me a little more sensitive to people that are excluded.

Susan remembered some exclusionary and hurtful incidents from her elementary school.

I remember a kid spit on another kid's head. It was gross. This was a kid who didn't fit in and when this incident happened everyone in line either ignored it or laughed about it. No one told the teacher. I saw lots of cruelty, sure, between the kids. There was fights and bullying, and I was bullied, too. In grade two I think it was and I was very scared. They're very aggressive places, schools.

She did recall another incident that bothered her when she was just a young child.

I once got in trouble . . . I was a good kid, too. My father is a teacher and I knew how to behave. I'm eldest child and I wanted to be good, and all that. I was always a keen student, but I remember getting in trouble in kindergarten when we were watching a video. We had this little exercise to fill in some things, but first we had to watch the video, we couldn't do the assignment until the video was over. While I was watching the video, I also did the work, and then the teacher put me in the corner and wrote in my Report Card that I had to follow instructions better because I had not done things in the order that I was supposed to. It was very traumatic for me as a little kid. I remember crying in the corner. I was in trouble, and felt ashamed. But that's the way it is. You perform when you're told to. That is the message.

Having a father as a teacher helped her learn how to behave and how to gain acceptance from her own teachers.

I sat still for the most part. I read the material, I engaged, I asked questions, I showed an interest, I was keen to learn.

There was one teacher in grade six, Mr. B and he was a good teacher I thought, but he had favorites. And I was one of the favorites. I went to his home and play croquette with some of the other favorites. That was quite something to see... a teacher's home...and I got to meet his wife. That was something. But I think even then I had a feeling that it might not be right. I wondered about what's it must be like for Joey and Bobby and Susie, and all the rest that weren't in the special group or clan.

I can recall how it felt not to be part of the 'special group' that Susan described. I remember an incident from elementary school that has stayed with me all these years. It was easy to pick out the favourites in my grade two class. My teacher always called on them in class and they never got in trouble. There were others of course, myself included that she always seemed to leave out. We were the ones who got the strap for whispering in class and when she didn't strap us, she made us stay after school where we had to kneel with our noses pressed against the brick wall and pray out loud – giving thanks that she did not give us the strap. I remember so clearly wanting that to stop, so one day I asked my sister what I could do to make my teacher like me. She gave me a beautiful bouquet from her garden. I was so excited, I ran all the way to school. Each Friday students lined up at the teacher's desk to give her presents. When it was my turn, she unwrapped the flowers from the damp newspaper my sister so carefully packed. She said. "Oh look class, Elizabeth has brought me gladiolus. Too bad she didn't bring me my favourite flowers." She then proceeded to pull off each of the huge blossoms and counted the petals aloud as she dropped each one of them into the garbage can beside her desk. I can still remember the whoosh of newspaper wrapping that followed. I remember too, going back to my desk with a sick feeling in my stomach. I never told my sister about what happened that day. Susan remembers high school as a more difficult place to navigate.

In high school, I took it upon myself to dress in different ways. One time I dressed preppy, and then I would dress kind of punk, and then I would dress in clothes that I snuck out of my father's closet. I wanted to try to mix them up..... don't try to categorize me and classify me, that sort of thing. But this is like a little teenage amusement, the identity struggle...Really, I think, as a species, we're animals who have our pecking orders, and we're quite a cruel species, I think.

She talked about some of her high school teachers.

I've often experienced teachers who were real bullies. I've had a few teachers that believed strongly in corporal punishment. For example, they would slap you, hit you with a ruler, or give you the strap in the class. And then people bemoan that that doesn't exist anymore, but it was more just to have to be like a drill sergeant to keep everyone quiet and contained and keep a lid on the anarchy that could erupt when there was any freedom.

We wrapped up our conversation and made plans to meet again. Susan left me with these parting thoughts about why her school experiences were not as harmful for her as they were for some of the other students.

I was a verbal, auditory learner. I could process information effectively that way. I was literate because I went to school, knowing how to read. I was always bad at math, but I was given the message from my mom and dad – “well, we're both bad at math. Besides, it's okay for girls to be bad at math. I have to say overall, my whole experience of school is quite forgettable, especially the material that we were covering. There were certain things when I had a little more autonomy and could direct my study that felt good, but overall it was a lot of busy work.

Summary

I had a lot to process after hearing the stories of the three women who shared these school memories with me. The text of these narratives has been selected from the transcribed interviews and guided conversations in such a way as to provide to glimpse into the classrooms and school grounds that so affected the lives of three young students. What happens to us along the way can be located within socially constructed circumstances that altered our perceptions of others and ourselves. I included a few of my stories too, but as researcher - participant I have included most of my experiences for analysis in Chapter Three.

Initially I had planned to begin this chapter with my participants describing the guiding principles that form their teaching practice and their

analysis of anti-oppressive pedagogy. I am glad that I did not do that because we first needed to get to know Sandra, Louise, Susan as vulnerable, impressionable and sensitive children who grew up to become the women and the teachers that they are today. In Chapter Six, we will meet again, this time to discuss teaching philosophies, making connections between memory work and anti-oppressive pedagogy and the hopes they have for teacher candidates who will bring new energy and new ideas into the teaching profession.

CHAPTER SIX: Memories and Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy

How might we teach in and through the oscillating, slippery, unpredictably changing morass of determination that meet us in the spaces between historical events and our knowledge of them?...How might we teach in and through the leaky edges of the “social outside” of the curriculum and the individual inside” of the psyche? How might we teach in and through the discontinuities and ongoing cultural and personal histories that personal and social histories introduce into our very beings?

(Ellsworth, 1997, p. 116).

Inclusion and Teaching Practice

When we met as a group, Susan’s young daughter was with her. She is a delightful child, willing to share her mom with us for a little while. She played in another room but joined us from time to time to make sure her mom was close by. We were all reminded that it wouldn’t be long before this little girl would be in the first grade, and we knew that she would go to school a trusting and loving child. It is our responsibility to see to it that her teachers would at least be prepared to offer her and her peers a safe and inclusive space within which to learn. We acknowledged that although school experiences comprised only a portion of our social relationships, we agreed that what happened at school made a strong impression on us.

Sandra and Louise each stated that they thought about becoming teachers while in elementary and high school. Susan said she made the decision to teach when she was in her twenties. Although they did experience difficult times at school as children and youth, choosing teaching as a profession came about first of all because they had a love of learning and the desire to instill that in others. However, the desire to engage in anti-oppressive pedagogy came about from the experiences they had as *teachers* combined with post-secondary education or

because of in-service sessions that focused on oppressive practices based on race class and gender issues affecting students and faculty in the school environment and in society in general.

Each of the three women stressed that engaging in memory work from within a context of anti-oppressive pedagogy personalized the theoretical aspects of anti-oppressive education in ways that they had not expected. Sandra said that our conversations stayed with her for days afterwards and she told us that she felt that not only was she remembering incidents from those days, but in recalling those memories, she actually felt like that shy and uncertain little girl who so often stood on the outside, not sure of where she belonged. Sandra said that she gravitates to students who also appear to hang back and are at risk of being excluded or marginalized in the school environment.

Louise said she too, thought a great deal about our conversations and the stories she shared. She especially thought about the stresses she felt as a young child whose biggest concern was earning the approval of her teachers. Her father was a teacher and elementary school principal and in our conversations, she mentioned that from listening to his stories about students and the expectations he had as an educator, she had a type of map to follow when she started school. Louise told us that she would never answer questions unless she was sure she knew the answer, and at the same time, felt that she deserved the approval and accolades that came with having those correct answers. She said the thing that struck her the most was that until she placed those memories into context with what she knows now about difference and exclusionary practices, she hadn't thought there was anything at all disturbing about her elementary or high school years.

Susan's experiences were similar to the stories Louise shared. Her father was a teacher as well, and she felt that she had an advantage when it came to understanding classroom behaviour and the expectations of her teachers. She said that she did recognize this as a privilege until she attended a graduate course on anti-oppressive education that examined the social constructs that determined white and middle-class privilege in society. Susan said that after we did the

memory work, she could not stop thinking about her daughter and the experiences she would have with her peers and teachers in the years ahead. I mentioned that I was happy that my daughter was home-schooling her children, because it meant that at least for awhile, my grandchildren might be spared the same kind of peer experiences we all had experienced in the school environment. I asked Sandra, Louise, and Susan if those same systems of power are evident in schools today. They thought of several examples of how oppression based on race, class, and sexual orientation is readily apparent in the present school environment.

Our discussion turned to teaching as a profession and the role of teachers in the lives of their students. The three women shared the guiding principles that helped form their teaching practices. Each of the three women chose the practice of inclusion as the most important element of their teaching philosophies. Sandra began saying that she could identify with the students who were noticeably excluded in classroom and playground activities.

To me, being conscious of inclusion means that you have to take particular notice of students who feel like they are on the outside. Making sure that nobody is excluded through what's taught and practiced at school is the first step.

First of all, after the discussions we have had, I have learned that I can draw on quite a bit from my own personal experience of recalling the way I felt in school. I can identify with students who are perhaps the underdogs in certain situations. In addition, because of my belief that everything is connected and so whether I realize it consciously or not, the actions of myself or someone else and the things that are happening outside of school are all connected. I guess I was somebody who stood back a little bit. I waited to be invited in. I guess I would sense that about other children now. I can usually see if someone is uncomfortable or feeling that they do not belong. I guess that's the case. And the reason, that is something that is part of what I struggle with, too. Not so much in professional settings or work, but after all these because then I feel I have a reason to be there. I have a job to do. However, in a social situation even after all of these years, I still ask myself - where is my place, and do I belong here, and how do I fit?

About fitting in - You can't distinguish one drop of water in the pool from the whole pool of water, everybody is going to be touched. I think that maybe twenty-some years ago you could have said, "Well, that's not my problem." Now I think, as an educator in Saskatoon, or a citizen in Saskatoon, you cannot isolate yourself from the issues of poverty and all of those other issues and the problems that are created because of that. I just know that these issues are going to touch us all eventually.

She reminded us all about how important the curriculum and extra curricula activities are in establishing an equitable place for all students.

I think that the goal of “inclusion” is the most important guiding principle for me. Everybody should be somehow provided with an opportunity, an atmosphere, a climate in which they can learn, in which they can develop, in which they can grow to the fullest of the potential that they have. I am thinking that regardless of any of the different distinguishing features, there should be inclusion, however, as I say that, too, I know that sometimes that doesn’t always mean that it’s going to be in the same place for everybody. It has to be meaningful. So I guess that’s the other thing with the guiding principles, I think school has to be meaningful for the student. I think we have to create an atmosphere that is safe and respectful

Isolation, exclusion, feeling marginalized, on the outs, and not belonging was always there for me. That is why it is easier to reach out to somebody who is being left out.

Louise agreed and added her own thoughts about the need for inclusive practice.

I would say that the number one thing to strive for as a teacher is inclusion. Acceptance of a child for where they are at, no matter what their background, no matter what they’re bringing to school. A nonjudgmental attitude and openness. I would say that pretty well is it in a nutshell. Acceptance, Acceptance of my students - of who they are. So, we are talking values, then, I would describe inclusion as a value.

I always thought that because of my upbringing we were encouraged to have an open mind and to be accepting of others. I realize now that that wasn’t always the way we were, or wasn’t always what was modeled, but as far as let’s say what the ideal would be, there was this sense of social justice in my family. My uncle was a missionary in Africa, and so, at home, we talked a lot about Third World and people experiencing poverty and about how blessed we were. As kids, we were taught that everyone’s world wasn’t the same as our family’s little world. Dad had taught at a community school and he talked about his experiences with First Nations parents, First Nations kids. So when I first started teaching and went to a school on the West side, that was probably the best thing that could have happened to me because I had lived such a secluded, little, white, middle-class life.

Susan too, agreed that inclusive practice was crucial to teaching. She told us that it was through her mother that she learned that there were people in the world who faced difficulties and challenges in society because they were different or because they were alone and isolated.

My mother is a Home Care nurse and when I was a young teen, I went with her to help people that were in distress. I learned that there were people living in the same city I did that did not feel included or valued in their own communities. They lived alone and were often ignored by their neighbors. Like the little old lady that had 35 cats for example. I helped her clean up the house. And there was an older woman that had very crippling arthritis in her hands and feet, and I helped bathe her and look after her. Sometimes we were the only ones who visited and who cared. At a very early age, I learned that being left out was a lonely and frightening experience.

Inclusion has always been huge for me in my teaching practice. I think inclusive education needs to be compassionate. I think it needs to begin with a base of compassion. Here we are as a species continually doing horrendous exploitation of others. This is something that has happened repeatedly throughout history and why are we doing it, and how are we doing it right now? Just let's become more aware of what we are doing. And I think, too, the sad thing about it is that if we don't practice inclusive education, we are missing out so much. We are missing out on gaining the wisdom from other cultures and the interesting worldviews from other societies and cultures, and other ways of being a man and a woman.

Our discussion turned then to the ways and means by which we could bring about a more inclusive setting into our school environment. We talked about the “isms” mentioned by educators who engage in anti-oppressive education, like racism, classism, sexism and heterosexism to name just a few. I shared with them Kumashiro's (2000) thoughts about oppression in schools:

Schools are spaces where the Other is treated in harmful ways. Sometimes the harm results from actions by peers or even teachers and staff.... discrimination, harassment, physical and verbal violence, exclusion, and isolation ... Sometimes, however, the harm results from the inactions by educators, administrators, and politicians” (pp. 26-27).

I asked Sandra, Louise, and Susan to share their understanding of anti-oppressive pedagogy and to provide examples of their own experiences regarding any particular “ism” they wished to share in regards to the harm Kumashiro mentions above.

Racism and Stereotypes

Sandra began the discussion with a troubling incident involving racism and wanting to belong.

Anti-oppressive education, I guess, is about challenging the language, challenging any actions that you are aware of and for every one that I'm aware of, there's probably ten I've missed.

It is about taking a stand whenever you hear something that would exclude a certain individual or group. Or perhaps it is about being aware of what an individual might do to be included – to be a member of a group or even to avoid being pushed to the outside.

I can think of an example of how in the school that I was in before, which was upper middle class neighbourhood, white for the most part.

Out of a population of about 250 kids, there were only a few Aboriginal students. One Aboriginal boy, who was new to the school, was walking down the hallway with two other boys, and they were making fun of something to do with Aboriginals. And the Aboriginal boy was participating in it, too, and laughing and joking about a certain stereotype that had to do with Aboriginal people. But I saw the look on his face as one of the boys went on to tell a racist joke. I think he participated to the degree he did so that he could fit in and I was very disturbed by that.

I asked her how she handled this situation.

Later that day in class, we had a discussion on stereotyping. They were grade six students. I tried, I guess, to get them to start asking questions and start to come to a realization that sometimes we just say things without really thinking about what we are saying - because we heard them said before. We did a brainstorming exercise on jokes and who would be hurt the most by the punch lines. We also talked about why certain things make us laugh and I asked them to write down times that they may have laughed even though they really did not think the jokes were funny. Some of the students said that they laughed so that others would know that they "got it" even when they did not and that they often felt bad afterwards but never knew why they felt bad. The discussion ended with a plan to make some posters about how jokes might seem funny but could also cause hurt feelings.

I would say that anti-oppressive education encourages us to use the teachable moment but I also think it has to be planned into our daily schedules, into our curriculum. We have to be pro-active, I think, in that way. We can't assume that it is just going to happen. We have to actually plan lessons around it is what I think. To not do this, I feel would be an example if the 'inaction' that Kumashiro writes about. With students, we need to teach them not only to be critical thinkers about racism and the other 'isms,' but also to be critical thinkers about so many things.

Louise shared her thoughts on racism in Saskatoon schools.

Well, as much as we like to think that it is not as much of an issue as it used to be, I think the whole issue of racism . . . I mean, that is so huge, and it is kind of a blanket, I know. The whole issue of racism towards First Nations people is so apparent. In elementary school, somehow that racism is not necessarily as evident towards let's say black children or oriental children. But as soon as you have First Nations children or Métis children, then there are these blankets, these kind of blanket expectations that they will do poorly in school, or all come from dysfunctional homes. It is quite disturbing but it is so commonplace.

As Sandra and Louise's experience were with elementary school children, Susan's experience was with adult Aboriginal women. Her story indicated that racism within institutional educational settings cuts across age groups, especially when it comes to exclusionary curriculum and teaching resources.

I was teaching one summer at a women's prison. I didn't have a connection with the students. Then I learned anti-oppressive education theories in a graduate class I took and the next time I went to teach at the prison, I felt paralyzed. I felt guilty; I felt like an oppressor, I felt very uncomfortable in myself.

I was questioning why is this person going to have to gain these certain critical and analytical skills. What is the material that we are using? Why does she have to get her grade 12? Is that really going to help her as she goes back to her far Northern community with 90% unemployment? But she feels like a failure because she doesn't have that high school diploma based on curriculum written by white members of society. So I just feel like the whole system is quite unethical, and for adult learners it is a different experience when they are trying to get that grade 12 diploma. It is an unsuccessful and abusive experience in elementary and high school where they are made to feel stupid, and then we give them the exact same material more or less when they are older and say here it goes again. Now you have children, you have other things going on, and now you have to try to succeed doing this.

The whole thing is quite unethical, I think. And it is quite tragic really. So, it has made me feel like I don't want to participate in this system. The thing I find hard with the theory and practice about anti-oppressive pedagogy is in my work with grade six, seven, eights right now, I find myself wondering if curriculum and teaching resources will ever be reflective of their lives as young Aboriginal people in this province. If most of it is exclusionary and does not represent their lives then is that not racism?

We discussed this situation and Sandra mentioned the need for more professional development sessions that would address exclusionary teaching practice and the current curriculum in elementary schools.

Louise agreed with Sandra.

When I was at my first school, race was kind of an almost visible divide in the way the students were perceived. There were the white students and there were First Nations kids. There was almost an expectation that First Nation and Métis kids would do poorly, and I was working to prove people wrong. I was looking at what was going on around me, and some of the statements that teachers were making, and I was thinking, no, that is not right. That is not right. I remember a little girl in grade one whose grade one teacher said, "I'm not really concerned about her learning. I know she's just going to end up being a housekeeper at the Bess." And I remember thinking, that is so very wrong, but not having the wherewithal, or even necessarily the consciousness even to speak up and say "That is wrong."

I can certainly relate to Sandra's reaction of kind of feeling like we are working within a very white education system. This is a little different topic, but I have been ridiculed by my peers, my colleagues for taking part in racism awareness programs. If you can believe this, I overheard the comment once, "oh there goes the Aboriginal lover - Louise is the expert" Now that is just plain scary. Once, I had been away for a hockey game and this person just assumed I had been at some kind of in-service on Aboriginal education issues. The comment was a sarcastic "well are you Aboriginally aware now?"

Louise described how this sarcastic attitude showed itself again in the staffroom when she openly disapproved of racist jokes and jokes about same-sex individuals and said that racism and homophobia/heterosexism were quite commonplace in the schools. She agreed with Kumashiro's (2000) statement that peers, teachers and administrators must be aware of the hurtful actions and inactions that happen because of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Sexual Orientation

Louise offered her thoughts on the importance of resource material that situated same-sex families in a positive and accepting social circumstance.

I think our students are socialized to be homophobic. Very much so. Then you get the whole discussion around the church and the church's teaching. That is something that actually I was just speaking with a colleague about getting together

a group of interested people in our system to talk about how we can start beginning to talk about it.

Children's books that had two-father families, two-mother families, those kinds of things are available. I truly believe that children have to be able to see a mirror of their own lives in the resources we choose to use in the classroom. My coordinator came out and we had a good discussion about the way to go about this, agreeing that putting books on the shelf without any kind of pre-teaching or discussion among the parents or whatever is probably not the best way to go. So that's something that is also something that I'm interested in and we're looking to get some like-minded people together to start talking about how to address that issue.

Louise shared a discussion she had with her children about a same-sex individual in their school.

My children were talking about a boy in their school and it became obvious that this boy was homosexual. I was so disturbed at the end of the discussion because my oldest son said, "Uhh, I don't even want to go near him." I tried to get him to open his mind. Open your mind, boy. God made him, he is a person. Do you know him? Do you know what he's like? How he's feeling? How does he feel if every young man that goes by him in the hallway shivers? How does he feel about being ostracized? Does he have any friends? All these things I wanted to talk about, and he was so totally . . . he just shut me off. He just shut me down. My daughter is a little more mature and a little more open-minded, but it is disturbing because I thought, oh he did not learn this at home – where does this attitude come from? My hope is that through anti-homophobic education maybe a child who's in kindergarten now, who then would grow up to be 17, would look at that boy as just another boy.

Susan reminded us of the latest anti-gay pamphlet that had been distributed by a local man running in the coming federal election.

I wonder how hate material can circulate in public and whether the average taxpayer knows their tax money has funded it. It is so offensive to me, and so hateful, and I wonder if this is indicative of our society. If the school going to be the place where you can address those issues, then there might be some way to counter balance the hatred and stereotypes out there. However, when the churches, the media, the popular culture all are suggesting that it is acceptable to do hatred towards people because they are gay then we are in a lot of trouble.

Sandra joined the discussion at this point.

*You have to be careful when you say **all** because there are churches now like the Anglican Church, for example, that is divided over issues like accepting same-sex orientation. There are places where they are using institutions like churches and schools to try to effect social change. But I guess I wonder also, I mean, we all*

have some autonomy ourselves in what we can do in teaching against homophobia, but whether it's through a school system, or whether it's through a department of learning, when teachers realize that there's a mandate to teach anti-heterosexist education or other forms of anti-oppressive education, then they're going to do it . . . Is it bottom up, top down, both? Where does change come from? The trouble with the institution of education is that decisions do usually come from the top. This is quite troublesome because most of the administrators are white, male, and middle-class. Issues like discrimination based on race, sexual orientation and class have just come to the surface in a public way over the past few years.

Poverty and Violence

Sandra said that class and poverty are issues where she teaches.

It's pre-kindergarten through to grade eight It's a community school, it's an inner city school. Many of the kids are bussed in from a neighborhood known as containing mostly low-income housing. Poverty issues would be one of the biggest issues for our students, so we have a nutrition program and things like that. I'm guessing, about 85% of our students are Aboriginal. There are ten full time teachers; nine teaching assistants, a home-school liaison, a home-school coordinator, a nutrition advisor and two elders were recently hired. There would be about 160 students at our school and the majority of them are poor. There are certain things that they experience in their lives that I did not see when I was teaching on the East side of the city, Violence is prevalent in so many of their lives.

She continued with an example of the violence her students witness.

The kids that I work with, especially this area where they get bussed from, it's not unusual for them to be traumatized daily. They come to school and some students provide graphic descriptions about seeing the family pet mutilated. Some have witnessed arguments between parents or between neighbors where guns are used to threaten or worse. Students told me about the threats and the violence they face from the gangs who hang around the restaurant right beside our school. Even walking to the local Tim Horton's for coffee or soft drinks can be a frightening experience for the teachers and students, because you see young people in the vicinity who are carrying weapons. Young people that live near the neighbourhood bar that we walk past to get to Tim's everyday - they carry weapons. How do we, as teachers help our students survive in this type of environment? Some parents, teachers, administrators, and others fall into the terrible mind-set of blaming and stereotyping the victims. If we all don't learn to view poverty, violence, and class oppression as part of the damaging social system we live in and as being connected to violence - we will be doing harm to our students.

Louise added some thoughts and feelings about poverty and the difficulties students in inner city or community schools face.

I teach in an inner-city school as well as in a school in a middle-class neighborhood. I see some similarities in the concerns and day-to-day lives of the students. I overhear conversations amongst the kids –in both schools about movies, video games, certainly clothes and the latest fashions, parents, teachers, homework – all of those things. But in the inner city schools the kids are also talking about whether there will be any food in the house when they get home. They talk about their parents looking for work and not finding any jobs. They know about social services, social workers, and they sometimes voice their fears about getting beat up or bothered by gang members on their way home. Its not that things like this don't happen at my other school- but they are more commonplace in the inner-city neighborhoods. What I think really divides these neighbourhoods is that there is the expectation of safety, expectations that our children are looked after – fed and clothed and all that. These things are not a given I know, but in the inner-city neighborhood where I teach, expectations towards the negative are more the norm.

I asked them if they have seen an increase in violent incidents in the school environment over the years. Sandra felt violence seemed more prevalent but also noted that there is also an increase in public awareness of violence in the schools. Susan reminded us though, that we must be careful of the media influence in how violence is portrayed.

I think the media is hungry for any tidbit of or violence. There is often a strong element or inference of blame. Often movies or TV shows portray minority groups as the only ones who do violence. They feed on images and stereotypes. How often do you see the larger social issues of poverty, discrimination and harm done by white or mainstream society being the main theme of a movie?

Maybe we live in a more violent time. Kids are certainly exposed to more graphic violent images and they play violent video games, and so on. They watch a lot of TV and they see some very negative violent images. However, if we don't pay attention or discuss some of the deeper implications of social stratification with minority groups but certainly with mainstream dominant groups of young people – they will perpetuate the stereotypes.

Sandra added her thoughts to the discussion.

I agree that it is a social issue. At my school, they not only see it on TV, they live it in their lives everyday. So lots of them are part of gangs in grade one and two because their parents are, their cousins are, their brother is. I agree that violence

is sensationalized in the media but it is also a very real issue in so many communities – it definitely is a social issue.

I asked Sandra, Louise, and Susan to share some thoughts about the ways in which addressing violence is being taken up in the schools today.

I think that maybe now students are maybe more encouraged to come forward when they experience violence at the hands of other students. There are a lot more programs around bullying for example. Students are encouraged to come forward and look for that safe person, and they are taught that doing violence is not acceptable. They are told that if you are feeling uncomfortable then you need to find somebody to talk with about what happened to you.

Susan agreed with Louise and said that the youth she works with are taught about the disastrous effects of violence through bullying.

They teach the kids, everybody, about empathy, compassion, certainly about values. They have four core values and they have assemblies about them. They give the teachers time during the day to talk about them and incorporate those topics and values and moral education into their curriculum. It's a big push.

Sandra had similar experiences.

I would agree that I think our students are encouraged to come and tell us if someone is physically abusing them or teasing them. I have also shared with other teachers, the resources that include stories about bullying and fighting and about being left out and ignored. Students are sometimes asked to talk about things that have happened to them – to personalize the acts of violence or hurtful situations. But, I think you have to have a teacher that is very knowledgeable and comfortable doing that because when you start out, you are opening up a big assortment of problems for the student that discloses personal information.

As our discussion ended, Sandra voiced what I was thinking.

More than anything, our students need to be safe and the teacher more than anyone else. In the whole process of educating needs to be able to put their students' fears and concerns into larger contexts (than just acts of individual meanness) for all of them. I think this larger context comes from the theories learned through anti-oppressive education.

Summary

The time we had together was ending. We all agreed that this research process produced many questions about where to go from here with the knowledge and perceptions we had just shared about anti-oppressive pedagogy. Even though we had all experiences with oppressive practices, we agreed that our designations as members of dominant groups in society such as white, working to middle-class, heterosexual women could hamper our abilities to address issues of race, poverty, same-sex orientation in meaningful ways? Ellsworth (1997) states, “How might we teach in and through the discontinuities and ongoing cultural and personal histories that personal and social histories introduce into our very beings (p. 116)?” In other words, Ellsworth is asking educators to consider that all teachers bring to teaching many embedded nuances and socially constructed perceptions that define us as members of dominant groups in society.

Sandra, Louise, Susan, voiced reluctance to end our sessions but expressed relief at the same time. It was difficult to look back and see us as the young children who were positioned to participate in social circumstances that did harm to others and to ourselves. We agreed though, that our memory work provided a starting place where we could - at least - try to avoid replicating oppressive practices in our classrooms. I asked them if they had any parting words for teacher candidates and the practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy.

Sandra began the discussion.

If you can be aware that your students are fragile and vulnerable – because society labels and judges them –you can create a place in your classroom where they feel safe and valued. That will be doing a lot to change how others in the same environment will treat them too.

Louise added her thoughts to Sandra’s.

I can tell you that I hope things will be different with you because of the education you are receiving about difference and exclusion and the harm done when

teachers expect students to fall into preconceived categories. My son was what I would call a square peg that was expected to fit into a round hole. His self-esteem was nearly destroyed as a young child in school because he wasn't like the other children. I don't think his teachers intentionally did this, but they just weren't aware that he needed to be respected for the abilities he did have. After some really difficult years, he was fortunate to have a teacher who could see his potential and who made him feel that he could succeed because of who he was – not in spite of it. One teacher really made a difference – that is what I see ahead for you.

Susan wrapped up our conversation.

*Quite often teachers will spend inordinate amounts of time trying to figure out how to help certain students “fit in.” Why would you even **want** to work at helping someone fit into such a flawed and oppressive education system? It is time we started revamping education methods so that we can “fit in” to the realities of our students' lives. I think with the anti-oppressive education you will be able to understand that so much better than others that didn't take this course in their teacher education program.*

My research indicates that the inequity, power, and authority (the injustices) Hobson (2001) described, are situated within the highly charged emotional realm of teacher/students relationships. For example, I can recall times when a school teacher said something so hurtful or acted in such a way, that going to school the next day was incredibly difficult and daunting for me. When my participants and I shared memories of our elementary school experiences, the memories evoked strong and often negative emotions about school, even some thirty or forty years later. Perceptions of who I was in the world were determined in part, by how my teachers and peers treated me in school. These experiences seemed like everyday common occurrences that happened to many children who for some reason did not fit into perceptions of normality. The stories my students shared about their past school experiences indicated a strong sense of wanting to belong and to be like everyone else. Common to all the examples of marginalization and exclusion was the idea that for one reason or another the judgments were made based on the idea of fitting in or not fitting in. The majority of students remembered trying to do whatever they could to fit in. They discussed the ways in which they learned that difference was seen as

negative state and began making connections to racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism and other forms of for oppressive practice.

As Adams (1997) states “Normal was about being middle class, normal was about whiteness, and not being ethnic, normal was about proper expressions of gender” (p. 87). Looking back now from within a framework of anti-oppressive educational theories, it is not difficult to locate issues of class based prejudices, sexism, and other areas that clearly indicate oppressive practices happened in schools that were never taken up as such. Exclusion or ostracization by peers or chastisement from teachers was often the inevitable result of not fitting into the accepted “norms.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: Further Analysis

In the following chapter, I will share my thoughts on the conversations with Sandra, Louise, and Susan. This chapter will, I believe, prove the most difficult for me because it is time to stop wading through the troubled waters of the past and try to make familiar the uncharted course I had embarked upon. I think my fear of deep waters draws me to this particular analogy. For the times I felt I was drowning in a sea of information, the times when I was in too deep to quit, and for the promise of land that drew me to the shore when I struggled to breathe, there was always the promise of bounty floating on the surface. I describe the data presented in this chapter, as ‘bounty’ because of the *likening* of bounty to treasure. I prefer to think of the data my research generated not as actual ‘treasure’ but rather as a process that generated a *treasure map* – drawn to propose a quest where each road and pathway hints at promised treasure, but the destination itself is hidden by obstacles and remains elusive.

I found out though, that the solid ground I could see off in the distance, as I tried to stay afloat, was an illusion. In reality, the solid shoreline hid uneven terrain, jagged edges, steep cliffs, and crevices that threatened slippage and entanglement. The treasure chest turned out to be one of those puzzle boxes that held another box and then another and another and so on. Each box held clues to constructing the treasure map. By *making meaning* of the clues from each box, I address the purpose of my research. I will construct, hopefully, a new map to help teacher candidates make personal connections to the theoretical application of anti-oppressive pedagogy.

According to Josselson (1999), narrative inquiry is a research method that asks researchers to *make meaning of* particular information. The challenge comes

in placing the *meaning* within a wider theoretical underpinning. She argues that culture and ethnicity, gender, spiritual beliefs, class designations, family values, and other constructs point to the embodiment of multiple truths within narratives and within how researchers *make meaning* of these narratives. Josselson reminds researchers that narrative research “embraces paradox and cannot be therefore defined in linear terms” (pp. ix-xii). The paradox she refers to is the “unsaid” present within every conversation or narrative that must at least be acknowledged. As researcher and participant in this study, I can only ask, what makes the unsaid in our talk (narratives) recognizable as such? An example of the unsaid is made obvious to me by the missing references to sexism, as an oppressive practice, in the narrative portion of this research study.

I did not define which topics my participants should share through the narrative process. The memories surfaced at will and the progression of our conversations followed no particular structure. The absence of sexism as a topic of oppressive practice is very interesting. I asked my participants to comment on why sexism did not come up in the memories or conversations we had about the issues facing their current students. Sandra, Louise, and Susan said that they did not really know why that did not emerge. We agreed, however, that we have all experienced and continue to experience sexism. Each of us has, at one time or another, agonized over patriarchy, has been sexually harassed, and has been silenced by gender imbalances during the course of our lives. Perhaps the topic did not come up because we have each internalized certain aspects of sexism in our lives. At the same time though, we acknowledge the ongoing work we do as activists for social justice. We constantly work to dismantle sexist stereotypes. We react negatively to sexist jokes and to the use of language insulting to females and males. We do not knowingly participate in sexist acts against women or men. At the same time, we are vigilant about selecting gender inclusive and anti-sexist curriculum in our teaching practice. We also provide awareness about the violence against women and girls, men and boys that happens everyday and by encouraging our students, colleagues, partners, daughters, sons, other family members and friends to actively work against sexism in all its forms.

Perhaps we did not discuss sexism because it resides in the unsaid. The unsaid can, “mark the interplay between the said and the not said in moments of negation, evasion, revision, denial, hesitation, and silence” (Rogers, Casey, Ekert, Holland, Nakkula & Sheinburg, 1999, p. 79). They also argue that the unsaid or not said may refer to what is not named or what may be unsayable because it may be about things that are too painful or personally threatening to acknowledge. The authors remind researchers however, that any analysis or interpretation of data that recognizes only the “said” risks overlooking crucial aspects of understanding and meaning. Interpreting the “unsaid” would be a risky and presumptuous business however, (as in the case of the ‘presence of the absence’ of sexism), researchers can address what is said, what is understood and only allude to what may have been left out in the making of meaning which is what narrative inquiry encompasses.

Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) description of narrative inquiry, as mentioned in Chapter Four, as three-dimensional is a good fit for my research analysis. They offer this three dimensional concept after taking Dewey’s (1934) exploration of interaction (personal and social), situation (place), and continuity (past, present, and future) and suggest that “the writer tries to compose a text that looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within place” (as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, pp. 139-140). Looking backward and forwards places a temporality or connection to the world in terms of past, present, and future experiences. By inward and outward, the authors are referring to the feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions and moral characteristics related to the period under research (pp. 50-51). Backward/forward and inward /outward glances help us to *see* the personal and social by uncovering and recovering our own and other peoples stories as they bear upon and transform our own. These practices help us make sense of the world at any particular time and place and are essential to narrative research so that we are able to meet ourselves in the past, present and the future.

According to Huber and Clandinin (2004), narrative research represents people “not as taken apart by analytic categories but as people who were

composing lives full of richness and complexity” (p. 162). The narratives shared by the participants in this study offered rich descriptions about childhood experiences that upon close examination, indicate that as children we adhered to hierarchies based on class, economics, religion, race and ethnicity, gender, and other social issues. While we would not have been able to name these hierarchies as such, they were nonetheless present in the relationships we had with other students and in the relationships we had with our teachers. Fitting in and not fitting in, rewards, and limitations, expectations and disappointments are highlighted in the vignettes we share through our narratives. I chose the term ‘vignette’ because, according to Encarta World Dictionary (1999), a vignette is “a painting, drawing, or photograph that has no border but is gradually faded into its background at the edges.” I think our stories provide pictures of each of us starting out as young children who are taught to fade into the background by adhering to borders we can not see, but are taught to recognize each time we get too close to the edge.

This analysis also centres around who we are as adult women and as teachers, as we integrate what we learned through our memory work with some thoughts on current day teaching practice and anti-oppressive pedagogy. It is within this context that we can speak of racism and other oppressive practices we witnessed happening to others.

Looking Inward: Memories

In the act of telling our stories, we make dimensions of schooling visible which have long been obscured in our focus on methods rather than meanings. However, the stories we tell are our creations, and this gives us meaningful ways to reflect the selves and the positioning of the selves that create the stories.” Narrative with its ability to delve into how education is experienced body and soul, allows us to access social, political, and ethical dimensions of schooling which are often “controlled out” of our educational research (Smith & Paul, 2000, p. 11).

How we were positioned, as children and youth by the social, political, and ethical dimensions of schooling comes through the stories that Sandra, Louise,

Susan and I shared. The questions that were generated by our experiences are interspersed throughout the following analyses and are a clear indication that the effects of oppressive practices are still being felt in schools today.

Not Fitting In

Both Sandra's and my own earliest memories about school had to do with being left out and because we were different. Although she came from a rural community and I lived in the city, our families were limited economically. Sandra's parents were struggling to make a living from a small farming operation where many families in the same community owned large, more productive farms. My mother was a widow raising a large family on Social Assistance. She was a single parent in an era where two parent families were the "norm." Low incomes and Catholicism played roles in the experiences we had about being ostracized, teased and isolated by our peers.

In terms of economics, Sandra's story about being ostracized because her parents could not afford to donate much money to the Church paralleled my own story about my mother only donating coins to the Sunday collection plate. In Sandra's community, the amount of donations and the names of the families who donated to the Church were published every month. Families who donated the most were often invited to the Nuns' house for dinner. Sandra's peers bragged about their invitations and they teased and insulted her because her family was never invited. In my case, another child informed our grade one class that my family only put coins in the Collection basket. The kids made fun of me but were also angry with me, and said if my family really loved Jesus, we would find a way to give more money to the church. Similar comments surfaced when the nun in my grade one class made a big chart for Lent and Advent and entered the donations each of us made to the Holy Childhood (a fundraiser for orphaned children). Looking back, I remember that while my peers castigated me for being poor⁶ they also equated poverty with being a bad Catholic.

⁶ I use the word 'poor' in this case, because that was the word the other kids used to describe me. It was used as an insult. It was a word used to delineate differences they noticed between their

As children, we were immersed in social and institutional practices that rewarded those who belonged to the dominant groups in society and denied those rewards to others because of some perceived deviation from the acceptable norms. Many of the school memories Sandra and I shared had to do with how others viewed us, based on the visible signs of belonging to a low-income family. Trying to *make meaning* of our experiences generated many questions for my participants and I.

Fitting In

Louise and Susan contributed different experiences about class issues. They were similar to each other in that both defined their families as middle class. Louise attended a Catholic school and Susan a Public school. Both said they *never questioned* fitting in – it was something they each of them took for granted. Louise’s dad was a teacher and school principal and her mother a nurse. Coincidentally, Susan’s dad was also a teacher and her mother a nurse. As we talked, both women were surprised by the similarities in views they had about schooling even though they had never met before and they grew up thousands of miles apart. Louise and Susan agreed that they both took their cues on how to behave in school from their dads. The talk around the dinner table often turned to things that happened in their dads’ classroom, and thinking back, they realized that they had internalized certain types of behaviour, based on their dads’ expectations of students. Knowing how to talk to teachers, how to behave in the classrooms, how important completing homework was, how to do well on exams, and the pressure to meet their teachers’ expectations because they were the daughters of teachers were some of the common experiences Louise and Sandra shared. Louise and Sandra also agreed that they were rewarded for coming from the backgrounds that they did.

families and mine. Certainly, elementary school children would not have had knowledge about the poverty line, government statistics on income, or socio-economics. Their treatment of me, and others, as Sandra, Louise and Susan narratives indicate, was likely rooted in determinants that they noticed from listening to adults.

Looking back, Susan says she remembers that she always had friends, had a sense of belonging, and was reasonably self-assured. Louise remembers that she and her friends had nice clothes, new school supplies whenever they needed them and that she never felt left out or like she did not belong. Susan pointed out, that she experienced rewards because she was a “good” student. Her story about the invitations to her grade six teacher’s house, was a good example of the reward system. The story also adds perspective to Sandra’s story about never being invited to the nuns’ home in her community. Susan remembered that only certain students were invited to a teacher’s house for dinner. As one of those students, Susan met her teacher’s wife, played croquette, and had dinner with them. Susan said that her teacher made her feel special and while she enjoyed that, she recalls feeling awful about the others who were not invited. Looking back, Susan said that the favoured group were better dressed, had good grades, were white, and their parents were all professionals. Louise too said that as early as grade four she understood on some level that she was treated better by her peers and teachers than others were. She remembers very clearly being aware about income differences in her class, but also she recalls feeling very relieved that her family had money.

Louise and Susan’s experiences speak to two important aspects of their schooling. They enjoyed a series of privileges, that are similar to McIntosh’s (1998) list of unearned privileges that white people are granted based on the color of their skin. What is most significant here is the notion put forth by McIntosh (1998), Norquay (1993), Frankenburg (1996) and other educators is that we were taught as children and youth not to see ourselves as advantaged and privileged. While these authors provide a context to explore racial privilege, the same argument holds true for privileges afforded to all members of dominant groups based on class, gender, sexual orientation, able bodiedness, areas of mental health, religion, and so on. Relevant to my study is the notion of how young children benefit from belonging, and how those who do not belong are harmed by oppressive social structures that are set in place and yet never discussed as such. Tompkins (1996) argues that as a result, school children are

assigned roles, “that leave us alone to wander the world armed with plenty of knowledge but lacking the skills to handle the things that are coming up in our lives” (p. xvi). What I find most interesting is that Louise and Susan as children did not have the terms or words to describe their own class privilege, both *knew* they had it, and both could *see* that such treatment caused harm.

Looking Outward: Schools as Sites of Oppressive Practice

What kind of systems were at play when peers treated Sandra and myself (and countless others as scenes like this must have been played out over and over throughout the years) so badly because we were defined as ‘working class or poor?’ Adams, et al., (1997) describe classism as “the institutional cultural and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign differential value to people according to their socio-economic class” (p. 238). They describe a class continuum as the ranking of individuals or families, “by wealth, status, or power” (p. 238). These definitions are supported by countless academics and discussed in the disciplines of Sociology, Business, Economics amongst many others. My recurring question is, how did children in *grade one* know to tease, bully, reject and act in derisive ways because others did not seem to meet the economic status quo or the tenets of the Catholic religion - both of which we were all too young to even conceptualize? According to Woods (1984), “there is a strong connection between social class and the development of group perspectives...[that] will probably become an established part of a person’s way of dealing with the world” (p. 45) Assuming that children adhere to the ways in which their parents, teachers and other adults in society order the world around them, then clearly the children who taunted Sandra, myself, and others reflect the class biases of the adults in their lives. More specifically, our memories, or at least a good portion of them, infer that children and youth replicate the views of their teachers and other adults and emulate what appears to be common practice within the school environment.

Williams (2001) suggests that “One way schools as institutions are complicit in perpetuating domination and existing relations of power is through

school curricula that is selected by teachers with certain beliefs, values, and interests that are shaped by dominant culture (p. 56)” I remember very clearly the ‘readers’ of my early years education. Mom and Dad, Dick, Jane, and Spot held centre stage for much of my formative years. The family lived in a nice house; the kids had nice clothes, a nice dog, and nice toys. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe this process as the “hegemonic curriculum...not only because it holds dominant positions within schools, but also because it helps generate and reinforce class hierarchy in society as a whole” (p. 34).

I don’t recall any teacher ever *saying* explicitly that this was the norm and telling their class to be mean to those kids in class whose lives were not like that. However, the understanding was there. There were implications of normalcy and there were consequences for those of us who did not reflect the norms. Scholars like Giroux and Purpel (1983), Quigley and Holsinger (1993) refer to the production and reproduction of acceptable standards based on unstated norms, common sense rules, certain kinds of knowledge presented as facts, geared to middle class, white, male dominated society as being entrenched in the hidden curriculum. Our memory work indicates that students and teachers acted within, as Williams points out, “the highly selective views of reality reinforcing the dominant social, economic, and power arrangements in society” (p. 56). Ellsworth (1997) discussion of “address” helps us situate how we saw each other as children. Through our memories, we were not just recounting incidents but as Ellsworth stipulates, providing evidence of the “problematic ways that all curricula and pedagogies invite their users to take up particular positions within relations of knowledge, power, and desire” (p. 2). In the case of my participants and I, we were all affected in some way by the social designations determined by the dominant culture’s class divisions. If our teachers were representing society’s negative views regarding desirable and less desirable class designations, then it is no wonder that students followed suit.

The Role of the Teacher in Our Memories

As my participants and I struggled to understand the complicated relationships we had with our peers in school, we were also troubled by the idea that a lot of what happened to us. Each of us could recall several incidents when teasing, bullying, insults, sometimes violence occurred where teachers saw, heard, and ignored what they had witnessed. Sometimes the teachers themselves initiated humiliating incidents or insulted students with jokes and the use of sarcasm. As Tompkins (1996) says:

Only slowly, as the memories have ripened, have I begun to see their meanings, often so simple that I find it hard to admit their truth: such as that my school was not a healthy place for children; such as that school, although it taught me to succeed in its own terms, also stunted and misshaped me for life (p. xvii).

I agree with Tompkins as, sadly, my research suggests that school was not a healthy place for children. Sandra told us about a young boy who, although he got good grades, was bullied because he didn't dress very well, his hygiene was not up to par, and he had an attitude that got him in trouble. Sandra did not recall him ever being praised by teachers and she remembered that teachers did not intervene when he was being treated badly by others. She made an interesting point that was corroborated by similar stories from Susan and Louise. She said that if this boy had been better dressed, teachers would have been more likely to address the issues involved.

Educators Spindler and Spindler (1988), would agree with Sandra's assessment. They observed the classroom of a fifth grade teacher over several weeks. They asked superiors, students, and the teacher to do a written evaluation of his teaching methods and his relationships with students and staff. The administrators and staff rated his teaching performance and interaction with them positively. His self-evaluation was also positive, especially concerning his relationship with the students. He felt he was fair, inclusive, had no favourites

and he stated that he was well liked. The students however had very different reactions to this teacher. Several students said that he was unapproachable, that he never called on them in class, and that he only seemed to be comfortable with *certain* students. Spindler and Spindler's observations corroborated the students' opinions. They found that this twenty-six year old white male teacher only called on students who were white and came from the same ethnic and socio-economic background as he did. While he was not rude to any of his students, he did not offer encouragement and at times actually ignored the ethnic minority students in his class (pp.12-14). At risk with this kind of behaviour was the students' sense of self-esteem. Spindler and Spindler noted a difference in confidence and grades between the students who received positive feedback and those who were treated as if they were of no consequence. They kept track of which students asked the most questions, who the teacher stopped to chat with as he walked around the classroom during work times, and the grades of all students in the written and oral assignments. After his initial anger at and denial of the authors' conclusions, the teacher began to question his own abilities and in the end realized that he had singled out specific students for success and although it was unintentional on his part, caused harm to other students in the process (pp. 14-15).

The Spindlers (1988) suggestion that, "Children do not like failure any more than adults do. Children spend a good deal of their time avoiding failure - if not by achievement, then by not engaging" (p. 15). This phenomenon was evident in the stories shared by Sandra and Louise. Sandra said that as a child who had been isolated and teased by other kids, she hung back in any group situation until she was sure about what the other students were saying and doing. A quiet girl, she did not speak out during the first three years of elementary school even though she knew the answers. She did not recall any of their teachers noticing that she did not participate. Louise shared with us that although she was confident that her peers and teachers liked her, she would not answer questions if she were not sure she had the correct answer. She felt that her parents and teachers held her to some very high standards because her dad was a teacher and she did not want to let them down with a "wrong" answer. Susan

described the shame she felt when she was belittled in front of the whole class for not following her teacher's instructions. She said, thinking back, that although this experience was not a common one for her, she remembered being afraid of that teacher. She did not raise her hand to answer (or ask) questions in case she somehow evoked that anger again in her teacher.

We discussed the implications for young children who were afraid to speak out for different reasons. According to Tompkins (1996), her memories about being a "terrified performer" (p. 2) alerted her to aspects of schooling that are seldom discussed in teacher education, such as finding out what we need to remember student and teacher relationships in our past. These relationships when examined critically, reflect harmful social constructs and understanding the harm done is crucial to our development as teachers.

Making Meaning as Teachers

One of the things Sandra, Louise, Susan and I talked about as we shared our memories of schools and schooling, was the idea that even though we all could identify oppressive practices that were sometimes precipitated by our teachers, we still chose teaching as a profession. This was also a common theme running through the stories teacher candidates shared with me. Of course, we all could remember many excellent teachers that quite likely influenced our decisions to teach. However, through our memory work, we learned that good teachers also reproduced inequities in the school environment. Dan Lortie (1975) determined that by the time teacher candidates enter teacher education, they have had at least thirteen thousand hours to observe their teachers (as cited in Britzman, 2003). According to Britzman (2003) "this observation time is not passive but is charged by the relations of power operating in compulsory contexts...allowing students to "survive" in classrooms: students learn not only to interact with the formal curriculum of teaching and learning, but act as well within a hidden curriculum" (p. 27). These observations provide evidence of the box in a box in a box metaphor I referred to earlier. The only boxes I can unpack through this research study are the same ones my participants struggled to fill.

I/we attempted to unpack *meanings* from our boxes of school memories. I also address specific guiding principles that inform Sandra, Louise, and Susan's teaching practice and discuss the contributions my participants experiences can make to assisting teacher candidates in the practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy.

Guiding Principles

Sandra, Louise, and Susan agreed that the practice of inclusion is crucial to their teaching practice. Inclusion, according to these three women meant taking an active stance in working against oppression. Sandra drew from her memories to understand how she was constructed to be a shy and tentative young girl who chose the safety of the sidelines and waited to be invited in. Remembering how she felt when she was a child helps Sandra identify students who exhibit the same signs of isolation and withdrawal from activity that she experienced. To Sandra, recognizing that certain students are ignored or left out by their peers compels her to take action. She suggests that teachers question their students about their interests and investigate situations that invite the participation of those students who are otherwise left out. Sandra used her memories of the past to help her put practical application to Razack's (1993) challenge to dismantle "existing social arrangements" (p. 45). She feels that teacher candidates will benefit by identifying through memory work the social arrangements in their past that influenced how they fit into the social order.

Louise suggests that her memories of past schooling helped her recognize that even though she was aware that she benefited from her family's class designation, not everyone had a privileged and rewarding experience in schools. Thinking back, Louise says that although she "lived such a secluded, little, white, middle-class life," she never saw herself as such until she attended a community school where her dad taught. In recognizing her privilege, Louise learned to recognize the inequities certain children faced everyday. As Schick and St Denis (2003) remind us, when students examine their dominant identifications, they begin to challenge "the assumptions that normalize and naturalize inequality" (p. 67). Louise found that as Norquay (1993) described, "through memory work, I

can interrogate my history so that invisible practices of my privilege are disclosed” (p. 250). I would add however, that for Louise and others, these practices were not ‘invisible’ as Norquay suggests. At a very early age, she *knew* she benefited from her parents’ middle class status, just as most certainly Sandra and I were painfully aware that we were limited by our families status as not being middle class, even though we couldn’t name the practices. Our experiences leave little doubt that class inequities were not only visible but were reinforced.

While Susan experienced her schooling as a child of middle class parents, she learned about inclusive practice from her mother, a Home Care nurse, when she accompanied her mother on calls to her clients. Susan had not questioned her access to education, health care, and other benefits, until she realized that there were people in society who did not have this same access. She was struck by how alone some of her mothers patients were, and as a young teen she learned that “being left out was a lonely and frightening experience.” Susan used life experiences outside of her formal education to address what Adams et al. (1997), describe as “the pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions” (p. 4). This experience was to have a profound effect on Susan as she moved into the realm of adult education.

Through our narratives, we explored the common and different experiences we had as children based on how we were positioned within the class system. Classism is only one of the oppressive practices that students and teachers experience inside and outside their formal education. As white, working to middle class, heterosexual women, we do not experience racism, homophobia, violence, and poverty but we do witness them happening to others. The central tenets of anti-oppressive education help us address these issues in the school environment.

Racism and Stereotypes

Sandra began the discussion by telling us about an Aboriginal student who joined his white friends in joking about certain traits that they felt applied to all Aboriginal people. Sandra noticed that although the young man was laughing along with the other boys, the look on his face belied the outward laughter. As she

was teaching the same boys later that day, she engaged in activism by creating a lesson on the harm done through racist jokes and stereotypes.

Louise's strongest experiences with racism came from her colleagues' discussions in meetings and in the staffroom. She said that the comments of other teachers indicated an expectation that all Aboriginal students would do poorly in class and that they all came from dysfunctional homes. Louise found that when she tried to dismantle these perceptions other teachers became resentful. She learned that she had a reputation as a 'do gooder' and as she said, she was called an "Aboriginal" lover (a more politically correct rendition of the insult "Indian lover"). When Louise attended various professional development courses and cross-cultural education, several of her colleagues used insulting and hurtful language to dismiss her knowledge. Kumashiro (2000) describes schools as "spaces where the Other is treated in harmful ways," and he says that often the harm is caused by peers, teachers, administrators and politicians (pp. 25-26). Louise is concerned for the students who encounter these teachers in the classroom and on the playground. How do students learn to address each other as equal when some teachers engage in as Kumashiro suggests, "discrimination, harassment...and verbal violence" (p. 26). Louise also wonders, what makes the remarks some of her colleagues shared even sayable in the context of teacher relationships?

Sandra provided examples of institutionalized racism through her experiences as an adult educator in a Saskatchewan women's prison where nothing in the curriculum reflected the history or life experience of the prison's majority population of Aboriginal women. Susan said that the tenets of Adult education stipulated that barriers facing adult learners (especially individuals belong to minorities) must be recognized and addressed. However, she found that the high school upgrading offered in the prison did nothing towards preparing these women for employment. It did not address racism, poverty, patriarchy, and exclusionary practices of neither the dominant society, nor anything else that would offer critical analysis of our cross-cultural relationships. Susan found that the same expectations for failure that Louise referred to earlier were entrenched in the prison education system. Kumashiro (2000) refers to "insufficient instructional

resources and unsafe buildings and classrooms...serving economically poorer students” a form of institutionalized racism (p. 27). Sandra, Louise, and Susan share these stories in an effort to provide examples of LaRocque’s (1991) definition of racism to teacher candidates. LaRocque states that, “Racism is a particular prejudice that legitimizes an unequal relationship. In other words, racism is political; it facilitates and justifies socioeconomic mobility for one group at the expense of another” (p. 75). The terms and conditions described above by Sandra and Louise indicate the different treatment of individuals in society based on race.

Sexual Orientation

My participants addressed issues of homophobia and heterosexism in the schools. Louise shared a story about her teen-aged son who was not pleased to find out that a student he knew was gay. She had talked to her children about accepting difference with respect to sexual orientation, and she assumed her children would naturally treat same sex individuals with the same regard and respect they had for their heterosexual friends. She said her daughter seemed to understand, but her son exhibited homophobic behaviour. Anti-heterosexist educators Blumenfeld (1992) and Rofes (1995) discuss how boys will exhibit homophobic behaviour to impress other boys with their masculinity. They also act out against homosexuals to erase any designations of homosexuality leveled at them by other students if they show empathy, understanding, or respect for boys of same sex orientation. It appears that Louise’s son was acting within that particular mindset. According to Warren Pollack (2000), fear of being thought of as gay is a youth’s biggest fear and it prevents and buries emotional responses s/he may otherwise allow regarding other forms of oppressive practice.

Susan provided another context for homophobic behaviour among youth. She reminded us that media influence was a determinant in most things applying to teens. She referred to a local federal politician and a homophobic rant he had printed in a pamphlet that was delivered to homes across the city. Susan pointed out that teachers could use this particular pamphlet as an example of how hate literature is allowed to infiltrate our homes and businesses. She stressed the need

to take an anti-homophobic stance with youth in order to spread awareness of homophobia as an oppressive practice.

Sandra concluded our discussion on sexual orientation with the comment that when teachers see a clear mandate supported by the Department of Learning to take up education respectful of same sex orientation they will do so, but not likely before it becomes official policy. She reminds us that change will be initiated by the oppressed group not the oppressor group. The role for teachers and teacher candidates is to make available information that helps students understand that heterosexism and homophobia are oppressive practices akin to racism, sexism, and class hierarchies. Cynthia Rottmann (2001) says that we must encourage educators to view any teaching practice that continues to perpetuate oppression based on sexual orientation as “strange” or in other words, unacceptable (p. 12).

Poverty and Violence

We ended our conversation with a discussion on the connection between poverty and violence in schools today. Sandra provided examples where her students share with her the things they see everyday in their neighborhoods. Her students have witnessed the mutilation and killing of pets, rampant alcohol and drug use, and some disclose their experiences of physical and sexual abuse as early as the first grade. She links racism, poverty, class oppression, and denied access to employment as factors that precipitate violence in the lives of many of her students. Sandra refers to a damaged social system that on one hand offers tangible rewards to members of dominant society, and on the other hand blames and limits those it determines ineligible for those same rewards.

Louise adds that while students in the middle-class neighborhood where she works disclose abusive incidents, the types of disclosure are more serious at the inner-city school where she also works. She says that the inner-city school students often talk about the difficulties their parents have in finding work and her students worry about getting beat up by gang members on their way home from school. Louise, Sandra, and Susan agreed that more students are coming forward

now for counselling and to find out ways in which they can avoid harmful situations. Sandra closed the discussion.

More than anything, our students need to be safe and the teachers more than anyone else in the whole process of educating and teaching, need to be able to put these students' fears and concerns into larger contexts (than just individual acts of meanness) for all of them.

Sandra, Louise, and Susan said that it was through remembering the hurtful and difficult experiences they had in school brought the theories used in anti-oppressive education into perspective. It was difficult to return to the past and accept that at one time or another we all participated in harmful actions that would have long term effects for all of us. Sandra, Louise, and Susan offered their memories and their experiences of more recent times to help inform the teaching practice of teacher candidates and others who have the opportunity to avoid replicating and perpetuating oppressive practices in the school environment. The memory work and practical application shared by the three women provide an important record that may be used to enhance teacher candidates understanding and practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Reflections

I began the first chapter of this process by sharing a story about a troubled class. The teacher candidates were exhibiting difficulties in a course I was teaching on anti-oppressive education. The tension in the classroom was palpable. I had taught the course for several years, and had similar reactions from students, but not as severe as this particular group demonstrated. I spoke with a colleague who taught other sections of the same course and she defined this difficulty as resistance. She said that resisting anti-oppressive education was rather commonplace amongst teacher candidates and she provided with me several articles to read about why this was so. Up to this point, I had thought it was because I was doing something wrong as their teacher.

Britzman (2003) provides interesting discussion on the “roller-coaster of emotional response” when things are not going according to plan in the classroom. She asks, “How does one navigate the creepy detours of teacher development without recourse to adapting to preexisting models of education and so become stultified or disassociate from the implications of one’s decisions?” (pp. 22-23). Britzman’s eloquent description described my own predicament and she accurately articulates the concerns I had at the time. I knew that looking to the scholars and examining my own teaching abilities to help explain my students’ behaviour was an important step towards understanding what was happening. However, I also felt that my student’s well being should have been my first concern. As stated in my introduction, my students and I muddled through a few discussions on the uneasy feelings apparent during our class time. Although I engaged in a great deal of soul searching and researched the current academic material on student resistance, it was reading my students’ responses to an impromptu writing assignment about their lives as school children and youth that

altered my perceptions about their resistance to anti-oppressive education. I felt that I had been too judgmental and narrow in my views about their positions as white, mainstream, and privileged members of society. Reading their responses gave me the courage to re/view troubling school experiences I had as a child, but that I hadn't considered important to my development as an adult and as a teacher. This assignment also helped me see my students as the vulnerable, uncertain, hopeful, and mostly compliant school children they were before the larger systems of dominance and power in society helped shape and construct their adult identities.

I was moved by my students' stories about the relationships they had with their peers and teachers as children and youth in school that exploring school memories became the focus of my research. The desire to understand teacher candidate resistance to anti-oppressive expanded to an even bigger desire to better understand teacher candidates themselves. I soon found that the process of learning about my students would require that I learn about myself as a child who was also shaped and formed by schooling. The memory work was to expand yet again with the collection of stories from current teachers who would contribute what they re/called about school experiences. The research adds to the bodies of knowledge examining teacher candidates' difficulties in accepting anti-oppressive educational theories. I believe that teacher candidates benefit from exploring the memory work of practicing teachers because as Britzman (2003) suggests it allows them access to aspects of teaching like the doubts and fears, moments of vulnerability that have remained in the realm of hidden pedagogy. As Britzman points out:

Rarely disclosed by teachers themselves and absent from the students' account are the more private accounts of pedagogy; coping with competing definitions of success and failure, and one's own sense of vulnerability and credibility. Residing in the "heads" and "hearts" of teachers and emerging from their personal and institutional biography, this "personal, practical knowledge" or "knowledge made from the stuff of lived experience" is intimately a part of teachers' enactments (p.28).

Throughout the review of my literature, I explored how power and dominance within schools shaped and formed us in the process of ‘becoming’ teachers. One of the goals of anti-oppressive pedagogy is to encourage teacher candidates to recognize oppressive practices and to see how they function within the school environment.

Britzman (2003), Kumashiro (2000), Ellsworth (1997), and Tompkins (1996) added immeasurably to my understanding of why teachers need to explore the educative spaces where oppressive practices take place. Understanding teacher candidates beyond the labels that identify them as *mostly* white, working to middle-class, heterosexual, upwardly mobile individuals requires that we take to heart Ellsworth’s suggested power of address to expand on who *we think our students are* and to explore *who we think we are as educators*. Tompkins (1996) reminds us that “sooner or later, everyone has to leave school, if not literally, then in a spiritual sense” (p. xix). Through my thesis research, I learned that ‘leaving school’ also refers to taking leave of the restrictive, structured and damaged aspects of formal education. By incorporating the personal, the painful, the hopeful, and the retrospective examination of a system that was fraught with tension and oppressive practices, we can perhaps leave one version of school and work towards creating a new one.

Considerations

I am grateful to Darroch and Silvers (1982), Bogdan and Knopp Biklen (1998), and Clandinin and Connelly, (2000) for their groundbreaking work to ensure that narrative research become accepted as an ethical and important aspect of research methodology. Darroch and Silvers insist that the researcher’s biography is recognized as vital part of what is studied. They point out that the researchers perceptions are usually informed by the principles of watchfulness and existentialism (one’s place in the world) and that their involvement on a personal level permits care in expressing or disclosing our relationship with the ordinary. For me, as researcher, exploring the relationship with the ordinary provided the opportunity to investigate my school experiences, place them within the larger

constructs of anti-oppressive pedagogy, and have the process recognized as a valid part of the research procedure. I also felt that because I had just been through the process of remembering my school days I would better understand the task I required of my participants.

As researcher, I was privileged to observe the wide range of emotional sorting that Sandra, Louise, and Susan engaged in while telling their stories. These things are not evident in the finished product, but they affected me as a researcher, colleague, and participant. Non-verbal communication through body language, pauses, facial expression, eye contact, strengthening or softening of voice added texture and meaning to the narratives, that I could feel and see but were not apparent when our conversations were transcribed. The supportive murmurings of “uh huh” and “oh no” for example offered encouragement and understanding and give each of us permission to carry on or to stop the talk if need be (Minister, 1991, pp. 29-30). These things remained just between us, and made our communication closer and more intimate.

Through Britzman (2003), van Manen (2002), Kumashiro (2000), Ellsworth (1997), Tompkins (1996) and the others that have guided me through this learning process, I have found a hopeful space that allows me to see the positive in the experiences I had with my troubled class. I know that I don't know all the answers yet as to why students resist the information in anti-oppressive education courses. My research has provided me with more strategies than I had before. I know I will continue to use the memory work as part of my teaching methodology. The experiences that Sandra, Louise, and Susan shared will become part of the required reading for my course. The literature review I undertook in preparation for collecting the narratives provided me with an invaluable resource collection. My friends, colleagues, mentors, and loved ones were generous with their own stories and episodes from their past schooling, that while they are not an official part of this research project, kept me focused and heightened my awareness of how important memory work about school is to all of our well-being as adults engaged in life long learning. I am comfortable in the understanding that I don't have to know all the answers:

Much of what I know of teaching is tentative, contingent, and uncertain, I learned it by living it, by doing it, and so what I know is necessarily ragged and rough and unfinished. As with any journey, it can seem neat and certain, even painless, looking backward. On the road, looking forward, there is nothing easy or obvious about it (Ayers, 1993, p.16).

Suggestions for Future Research

Currently the anti-oppressive course I teach allows for one term or approximately thirteen weeks of study. The students' course evaluations indicated their frustration with the time allotted for this course. They said that it was difficult to process what they were learning in such a short time. Other students felt they were being blamed for circumstances entrenched in society long before they were born. They said that if they did not agree with the Reading Package authors or the instructor, they felt they would be labeled as racist, sexist, homophobic, and would not do well in the class. Several students suggested they would benefit from practical resources they could take with them to their classrooms. I suggest that educators take seriously students' evaluations and suggestions. These comments may be seen as resistance to anti-oppressive education, however, it is possible that the terms and conditions by which anti-oppressive pedagogy is taught may explain, at least in part, some of the students' negativity.

My students also recommended that all teacher candidates spend a significant portion of class time critically analyzing memories about their elementary and high school experiences. They also felt that *all* courses in their teacher education program should incorporate methodologies for the practice of inclusive and anti-oppressive pedagogy. My students suggested that all professors and sessional lecturers should be able to at least suggest anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-homophobic and other anti-oppressive strategies and resources from within their own subject areas. They felt that this would provide student teachers and in-service teachers with awareness so that they would not be as likely to perpetuate oppressive or exclusionary teaching practices.

The three women who participated in my study shared disturbing stories about how racism, poverty, violence and other troubling social circumstances are affecting their students. In Louise's case, she endured the derision of colleagues as she engaged in activism exploring racism in the schools. Looking back at the stories and witnessing my participants' dedication to making school a safe and inclusive place also indicates how important it is to have allies in the school system. In-service teachers would benefit greatly if teacher candidates are as well prepared as possible to engage in teaching for social justice in the schools.

I have learned from the conversations with Sandra, Louise, and Susan that memory work can be useful in the practical application of anti-oppressive pedagogy. I suggest that interviews about past school memories and current teaching practice be undertaken to highlight the thoughts and suggestions of teachers who are members of minority groups in society. This research would add to the information collected through the stories and perspectives shared by my participants.

Concluding Thoughts

I have learned that memory work can be a useful in helping students move from resistance to better understanding and identifying the social constructs that precipitated racism, classism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of oppression in the school environment. I also learned a great deal about teaching practice and about myself as a teacher. I was not at all expecting the learning curve I experienced throughout this process. The most humbling aspect of this experience came through the realization that I did not know enough about my students' lives, histories, and personal experiences to fully understand why they appeared to be resisting the course material.

I suggest that more research is needed into the practice of memory work as a way to address positive relationship building between teacher educators and teacher candidates. At the same time, I hope we will create for teacher candidates, the kind of learning environment that "gets right in there-in your brain, your body, your heart, in your sense of self, of the world, of others, and of possibilities and

impossibilities in all those realms” (Ellsworth, 1997, p.6). Britzman’s (2003) reminds us that:

Learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualized skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one’s past, present, and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach, like teaching itself - is always in the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become (p. 31).

I have learned through this research process that *becoming* is a lovely word. *Becoming* is the space where hope resides. *Becoming* allows us to see teacher candidates as learners in an education system that is still trying to figure itself out. *Becoming* is where we remain until education for social justice does not have to fight for space in a crowded teaching schedule but becomes infused into every aspect of our teacher education program. By making the experiences of local teachers available to teacher candidates, they are given access to the information they need about how issues of class, racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppressive practices are functioning in the schools where most of them will be working as teachers.

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APPENDIX A: THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Introduction and Background Information

- 1) How long have you been teaching? Describe the student/faculty population of the school where you are presently teaching.
- 2) What ethnic/racial background do you identify with?
What do you remember about the student/faculty population of the school/schools you attended?

Anti-Oppressive Education

- 1) Describe the guiding principles by which you model your teaching practice
- 2) How do you define anti-oppressive pedagogy or education for social justice?
- 3) Why is education for social justice important to you?
Are there any incidents that come to mind where you felt excluded or where you felt that your teacher or other students treated you unfairly?
- 4) Do you recall incidents or experiences where you may have treated others unfairly?

*If your answers to 4 and 5 are yes, briefly describe the incidents and try to recall how you felt at the time.

*If your answer is no – describe what it was that made you feel comfortable and safe at school.

Connecting the past to the present

- 1) What kinds of things come to mind when you think of your school days as a child and youth in the school environment?
- 2) Can you describe in particular any memories of bullying, hurtful behaviour or exclusionary practice in your elementary or secondary years?
- 3) How did your teachers or those in power, when you were in school, handle hurtful incidents and practices?
- 4) In what ways does looking back and sharing your past and present school experiences effect your understanding of current anti-oppressive educational theories?

5) Is there anything else you would like to share with the group?

APPENDIX B: A LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to participate in a study entitled: *Exploring Past School Experiences To Shape The Practice Of Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy*. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher: Elizabeth Mooney. Department of Educational Foundations.
University of Saskatchewan. 306-966-7514 or 306-966-5252

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to explore the question: How might educators use retrospective analysis of their past childhood school experiences to help identify incidents of oppression defined through current anti-oppressive education theories.

I will adhere to the following guidelines which are designed to protect the interests of everyone taking part in the study.

Potential Risks: I will interview you to explore your memories of past school experiences and your perceptions on the practice of anti-oppressive pedagogy in schools today. Each of you will be interviewed separately and you will come together as a group for questions and discussion at least twice over a two-week period. At times revisiting the past may lead to disclosure of difficult memories and experiences. If you require it, a counsellor will be made available to you at your discretion. Each interview will be audio taped. You may turn off the tape recorder at any time during the interviews.

Confidentiality: The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee the other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

Each interview will be transcribed and analyzed to discover the major themes we discussed. You will have the opportunity to check the transcripts at any time for

clarification. Because the participants of this study have been selected from a small group of people, all of whom are known to each other, it is possible that you may be identifiable to other people on the basis of what you have said. After your interview, and prior to the data being included in the final report, you will be given the opportunity to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, alter, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit. A pseudonym will be used in place of your own name in this thesis.

The tape recordings and the results of this study will be securely stored and retained for a minimum of five years at the University of Saskatchewan with my supervisors.

Right to Withdraw: Participation in the study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort (and without loss of relevant entitlements, without affecting academic or employment status, without losing access to relevant services etc). If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point: This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Sciences Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Office of Research Services (966-2084). Out of town participants may call collect.

The results of this study will be published in a thesis and may be written as a journal article. As well, the study may be presented at conferences.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of the consent form has been given to me for my records.

I, _____ understand the guidelines above and agree to participate in the study. I have retained a copy of the informed consent for my records.

Date: _____ Researcher's Signature: _____

If at any time you have questions about this study, you can contact my supervisors Dianne Hallman at the Department of Educational Foundations at 966-7724 or Linda Wason-Ellam at the Department of Curriculum Studies, at 966-7578; Or Elizabeth Mooney at 966-5252.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I appreciate your participation in the research study: *Exploring Past School Experiences To Shape The Practice Of Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy*. I am returning the transcripts of your audio taped interviews for your personal perusal and the release of confidential information. I will adhere to the following guidelines which are designed to protect your anonymity, confidentiality, and interests in this study.

- 1) Would you please read and recheck the transcripts for accuracy of information. You may add or clarify the transcripts to say what you intended to mean or include additional information in your own words. You may also delete any information that you may not want quoted in this study.
- 2) The interpretations from this study will be used in a thesis, scholarly journal articles or other similar publications and presentations. Except for the researcher in this study, your participation has remained confidential. Your name will not be used in the final report or in any scholarly articles or presentations if you do not wish it to be used.
- 3) In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Guidelines on Behavioural Ethics, the tape recordings and transcripts made during the study will be kept in a locked file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the tapes will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed.
- 4) Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw without penalty. If this happens, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

I, _____ understand the guidelines above and agree to

Release the revised transcripts to the researcher.

Date: _____ Researcher's Signature: _____

* If you want to call us about your participation in the study, you can reach us; Dr. Dianne Hallman, at 966-7724; Dr. Wason-Ellam at 966-7578; Elizabeth Mooney at 966-5252.

I have kept a copy of this form for my records.

APPENDIX D: ETHICS APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD

<http://www.usask.ca/research/ethics.shtml>

NAME: Dianne Hallman (Elizabeth Mooney)
Educational Foundations

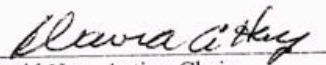
Beh 04-71

DATE: May 13, 2004

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "Exploring Past School Experiences to Shape the Practice of Anti-oppressive Pedagogy" (Beh 04-71).

1. Your study has been APPROVED.
2. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.
3. The term of this approval is for 5 years.
4. This approval is valid for one year. A status report form must be submitted annually to the Chair of the Committee in order to extend approval. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions
<http://www.usask.ca/research/behavrsc.shtml>

I wish you a successful and informative study.


Dr. David Hay, Acting Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

DH/ck

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